



A University of Sussex PhD thesis

Available online via Sussex Research Online:

<http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/>

This thesis is protected by copyright which belongs to the author.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Please visit Sussex Research Online for more information and further details

Queering Kinship in Urban China

Han Tao

Submitted for Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology

University of Sussex

August 2021

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

HAN TAO

THE THESIS IS SUBMITTED FOR DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
ANTHROPOLOGY

QUEERING KINSHIP IN URBAN CHINA

SUMMARY

This thesis focuses on queer intimate and familial life in urban Guangdong, China. By examining the dynamic understandings and practices of same-sex intimacies, a marriage of convenience (*xinghun*) between a gay man and a lesbian, and queer parenting, it unpacks the intricate link between cultural imaginations produced by globalised queer culture, social transformations in Chinese society, and personal choices in queer daily lives. My analysis is rooted in one year of ethnographic fieldwork, made up of participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

This thesis employs ‘queer’ and ‘kinship’ as fluid and dynamic concepts and practices. The practices of queer intimacy, parenting, and family formation detailed in this research suggest innovative and diverse forms of belonging, family, and relatedness beyond blood ties and the heterosexual nuclear family; at the same time, class stratification and gender inequalities are often reproduced during the dynamic interplay of socio-economic class, state policies and moral discourse that come to articulate Chinese queer life-worlds. This ethnography further delineates how queer co-parenthood is constructed and strengthened through the language of bodily experience and affective recognition. Non-heterosexual people’s tactics of forming and sustaining mutuality in their loving relationships both reproduce and transgress assumptions about biological parenthood and its centrality in the Chinese kinship system.

This thesis makes an original contribution to the studies of Chinese queer kinship in the context of our understanding of kinship and Chinese society in general. It investigates Chinese non-heterosexual people’s kinship practices with the purpose of furthering our understanding of sexualness, kinship, and social change in China. It also engages theoretically with discussions on queer utopia related to reproduction, modernity, risk, and care. In the context of socio-economic transformations and the technologization of biological reproduction, this thesis demonstrates how queer futurity and queer utopian imaginaries in urban China are made vivid and normalised by state-constructed modernity, dominant kinship norms, and glocal market actions.

Acknowledgement

Since I started my PhD in September 2017, countless people showed their support and gave me a great deal of encouragement that I truly cannot thank them enough. The seminars and workshops organised by Anthropology Department, Sussex Asia Centre, and Doctoral School at University of Sussex helped me improve my academic skills and offered me opportunities to present my research and receive feedback. I shared struggles and progresses with many amazing fellow students and academics here at each research stage, which made me feel I was not alone.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my supervisors, Filippo Osella and Paul Boyce, for their valuable advice and warm support throughout my PhD journey. Thank you both for always being patient and understanding with me, especially during the pandemic.

I am grateful to FfWG (Funds for Women Graduates) for the grant in the academic year of 20/21.

My sincere thanks go to all queer friends and PFLAG China volunteers I met in Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Chengdu, and other parts of China for the time they shared with me. Many of them became friends with me before or during my fieldwork and welcomed my research. A special thanks to my key friend-informants who firmly believe my research topic is important and let me enter their life-worlds. So many people approached me when I began my fieldwork and introduced me to their friends. I would not have collected life stories from so many individuals without their trust and help. Thanks to my partner, who accompanied me to numerous fieldwork meetups and encouraged me whenever I felt stressed.

Thanks to Muyuan, Po-Han, Oscar, and other scholars who researched similar topics and never hesitated to give me advice. Thank you to my global studies online writing group fellows who made my thesis writing a less stressful experience during the lockdown in 2020 and 2021.

I am obliged to my friends in the UK who gave me emotional support. Thanks to Kirsty for being my sounding board for ideas and information ever since I went to Brighton. Thank you to Naoms, Ash, and Lynn, who offered me their company and accommodation whenever I visited London for a short timeout. I am also thankful to my old friends Shan, Yunyi, Cong, Hanjie and Jie in China for their friendship and understanding, which helped me get through tough moments.

Lastly, I owe my deepest gratitude to my grandparents for their unconditional trust and support.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	7
Scope and Context	11
<u>Same-sex sexualities and intimate relationships</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Modernisation and internal migration since the economic reform.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Marriage, parenting, and family transformations.....</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>The practice of <i>xinghun</i> marriage and queer parenting</u>	<u>19</u>
Literature Review	20
Gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity	21
Between global queer culture, modernity, and locality	23
Queer futurity	25
‘New’ kinship studies and new reproductive technologies	28
Love, intimacy, and individuality	30
Queer kinship	30
Chinese kinship	33
Chinese non-normative sexual identities and relationships	36
Outline of The Chapters	40
 Chapter 2 Methodology	 43
Locating Participants	44
Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews	49
Participant Observation	51
As A ‘Native’ And as Queer	55
Analysing Fieldwork Data	57
Ethics	60
 Chapter 3 Practicing Intimate Relationships	 61
Shifting Models of Same-Sex Relationships	61
Seeking Reliable Lovers, Avoiding Risks	69
Maintaining Love: Forming <i>Jiban</i> (Mutual Burden) Without the Marriage Certificate	77
<u>Mo & Lin: “We Are in A Stable Relationship”</u>	<u>81</u>

<u>Zhao & Ma: “I Wished to Escape from a Stable Life”</u>	84
Conclusion: Queer Love in A Chinese First-Tier City	87
Chapter 4 Desiring Children	90
Moving to Parenthood	90
“Having Children Is Not Worth It”	94
The Vanishing and Emerging Practices	99
<u>Zhihu (Marrying a straight person)</u>	99
<u>Gay-Lesbian Xinghun (contract Marriage)</u>	103
<u>Guoji (Adopting from A Family Relative)</u>	110
<u>Assisted reproductive technologies alone without entering heterosexual marriage</u> <u>(out of wedlock childbirth)</u>	113
Conclusion: New Moral Dilemmas for Queer (Wannabe) Parents	117
Chapter 5 Embracing Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART)	121
IVF, Human Gamete Donation and Surrogacy in China	121
Ongoing Debates Over ART in Chinese Online Communities: The Image of a Wealth Gay Couple and A Poor Surrogate Mother?	124
The Only True Sponsor? ART Agencies and Their Marketing Strategies	130
“We Are Here Doing Good Deeds”: Non-heterosexual People Working for IVF/Surrogacy Companies	142
Choosing Own Children?	147
Conclusion: Reproduction Without Sex - A Liberating Future or Unaffordable Hope?	151
Chapter 6 Negotiating Conjugal and Parenting Relationships	155
‘My Own Children’ versus ‘My Partner’s Children’	156
‘Our Children’	162
“Children Will Accept Us If They Feel Enough Care and Love”	170
Conclusion: Blood Ties and Queer Relations	176
Chapter 7 The Chinese Version Of ‘Rainbow Family’?	180
Coming Big Home, Coming Small Home	181

Rainbow Families as Role Models: The Dynamics of Gender, Sexualness, And Social Class	186
Being ‘Ordinary’ (Invisible), Being ‘Radical’ (Visible) In Different Times and Spaces	194
Conclusion: Transforming Families and Queer Modernity	201
Chapter 8 Conclusion	205
Bibliography	215
Appendix I - Information about Key Research Participants	230
Appendix II - Glossary of Chinese Words & Slangs	231

Chapter 1 Introduction

In this thesis, I present a critical ethnographic exploration of non-heterosexual intimate and family lives in Shenzhen and its neighbouring urban areas of Guangdong Province, China. By focusing on the practices of same-sex intimate relationships, gay-lesbian *xinghun* (contract)¹ marriage and queer parenting, I investigate shifting kinship values in relation to sexuality, the state, moral landscapes, and the market. Through the lens of queer personal lives, I also explore transformations in Chinese society and queer futurity more generally. I will argue that, although the idea of blood and biology still holds centrality in Chinese family life, the various arrangements of parenting and family-forming practices in queer life-worlds demonstrate the mobilising possibilities beyond the singular definition of biology. This ethnography includes how queer co-parenthood is constructed and strengthened through the language of bodily experience and affective recognition. This research has found that the practices of queer intimacy, reproduction and parenting in urban Guangdong have created innovative and diverse forms of belonging, family, and relatedness beyond blood ties and the heterosexual nuclear family; at the same time, class stratification and inequalities are often reproduced in these processes. In the context of socio-economic transformations and the technologization of biological reproduction, this thesis demonstrates how queer futurity and queer utopian imaginaries in urban China are made vivid and normalised by state-constructed modernity and glocal market actions. In short, kinship in China is transforming, and queer relationships should not be defined as imitative or alternative to blood ties; the kinship practices documented in this research both reproduce and transgress the assumptions about biological parenthood its centrality in family-forming processes.

It is important to clarify my use of the term ‘queer’. Originally meaning ‘strange’ or ‘unusual’, ‘queer’ came to be used as an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities and as a theoretical critique in and beyond academia. As research on Chinese societies has already pointed out, the word ‘queer’ (or its Chinese version ‘*ku’er*’) is neither the common vernacular nor an identity label widely recognised among Chinese sexual minorities (Wei 2020:19). Scholars have chosen to use ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ (Sang 2003,

¹ *Xinghun* marriage refers to the marriage of convenience between a gay man and a lesbian, often for the purpose of easing family pressure and producing offspring.

Rofel 2007, Kong 2010), local terms such as ‘*tongzhi*’ (Chou 2001, Zheng 2015, Bao 2018) and ‘*lala*’² (Engebretsen 2008, Kam 2013) in ethnographic research on Chinese sexual minorities, and ‘queer’/ ‘*ku’er*’ (Engebretsen & Schroeder 2015, Bao 2018, Wei 2020) in Chinese media studies and activist literature. In common use, each of these terms may be perceived differently. My friend-respondents have used innumerable terms such as gay, bisexual, les, *lala*, *tongzhi*, and *zhiren* (straight person) to describe their sexualness or those of their same-sex lovers at certain life moments. During my stay in Shenzhen, younger respondents preferred to use the English terms ‘les’ and ‘gay’ to describe themselves. In other words, not all perceive Chinese terms like *lala* and *tongzhi* as essentially culturally unique and appropriate. Some of my friend-respondents have experienced changes in gender or sexual identity during their lifetime. Some of my friend-respondents were not certain about labelling themselves with any term. Some of my friend-respondents used these terms interchangeably. As I shall discuss in the literature review and chapter 3, these terms shouldn’t be understood as fixed and timeless identity categories for certain ‘types of people’; neither should these terms be put into an alleged Western-Oriental comparison. Even the concept of being Chinese no longer involves commonly accepted cultural standards (Cohen 2005:59). Therefore, using any of these idioms as if it is a self-evident signifier would be problematic. In short, my respondents were far from a homogenous group but, for the sake of simplicity, I choose ‘queer’ as the key word to distinguish their lives and relationships from heterosexual intimate and familial relations and heteronormative social spaces in urban China.

In this thesis, I use ‘queer’ as both a fluid descriptive term and an analytic perspective, a verb, and a method. Firstly, I don’t intend to use ‘queer’ as a categorical or politicised identity, but rather to understand queerness strategically as an umbrella term to refer to various forms of non-heteronormative genders and sexualness. This means I will not use ‘queer’ as a noun to refer to human subjects in my thesis. Instead, I choose to use ‘non-heterosexual’ as a loose adjective to refer to my friend-respondents. Furthermore, in this research I don’t see queer subjects as “always already avant-garde for all time and in all places” (Grewal & Kaplan 2001:670). In this way, this research uses ‘queer’ to disrupt the essentialist categorisation of sexuality and centrality of identity. Secondly, I use ‘queer’

² ‘*Tongzhi*’ (which literally means ‘comrades’, roughly referring to LGBT people) and ‘*lala*’ (roughly referring to queer women) are flexible terms that include gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and sexually fluid people. I will use these terms interchangeably with ‘queer men’ and ‘queer women’.

to refer to the ongoing and transforming forms of kinship. My focus on queer kinship involves not only non-heterosexual people and sexualities *per se*, but also the practices of kinship that destabilise normative kinship norms and provide us with new perspectives on reproduction, futurity, and relatedness. Queer theory, as a field, has expanded beyond issues of sexuality and identity politics (Moore 2019, Boyce et al. 2019), and queer itself might act less like a noun/adjective and more like a verb, “a ‘queer studying’ even of things not self-evidently queer” (Boellstorff 2010:215). As I will elucidate in the literature review, kinship is not biological facts but a dynamic process (Strathern 1992a, Franklin 2013). By bringing the term ‘queer’ into Chinese kinship studies, I perceive queer as beyond sexuality and identity, using it as “a critique, an analytic” (Weiss 2016: 628). The ‘queering’ of kinship is not perceived merely within the scope of (queer) sexual desires, but exists in every aspect of the society at large.

Since the introduction of *gaige kaifang* (reform and opening-up) policy in 1978, China has experienced radical socio-economic transformations and modernisation. The notions of family, marriage, and intimacy in Chinese society have changed enormously in recent decades as the younger generation enjoys more individual autonomy, privacy, and is subject to less parental authority when it comes to love and marriage (Yan 2003, Riley 1994, Wolf 1984). At the same time, scholars have observed that contemporary Chinese familial life and intimate relations have remained “similar to itself” (Brandtstädter & Santos 2008), demonstrated by few out-of-wedlock childbirths (Xie 2013), unrecognised intimate relationships outside marriage (Yu & Xie 2015), continuing parental involvement in married lives (Pimentel 2000), the imperative to marry (Kam 2013, Santos & Harrell 2017), and filial piety and elderly care mainly provided by offspring (Li 2011b, Tang & Chen 2012, Xie 2013). Kinship in contemporary China thus holds some distinct characteristics in ongoing transformations, which are most pronounced and complicated in queer personal lives and the emerging practices of new reproductive technologies. Still, kinship studies in China are dominated by the study of heterosexual relationships (Engebretsen 2008, Kam 2013); work that makes wider links to kinship and family is limited. Although there have been extensive studies on Chinese non-normative sexualities (Kong 2010, Kam 2013, Engebretsen 2014, Zheng 2015; Bao 2018, Wei 2020), Chinese non-heterosexual people are often delineated through the lens of non-normative sexuality and gender rather than the lenses of care and durable relationships. Chinese non-heterosexual subjects are rarely imagined as being able to form families, and hence

studies of non-heterosexual families and queer parenting remain marginal. Chinese non-heterosexual people's participation in the field of assisted reproductive technologies has also not been ethnographically studied.

This research, therefore, draws attention to non-heterosexual people's strategies of forming and sustaining kinship relationships. The central questions this research addresses are: how is queer kinship practiced and recognised in Chinese society in relation to state policies, cultural conventions, and modernisation processes? How do non-heterosexual couples choose certain tactics to construct enduring loving relationships and families? How do Chinese non-heterosexual individuals imagine their future and plan for their elderly lives? By exploring the dynamic understandings and practices of love, care, risk, and parenthood in non-heterosexual people's personal lives, this thesis unpacks the intricate link between cultural imaginations produced by Euro-American originated queer politics, social transformations in Chinese society, and personal choices in queer daily lives. By capturing the emerging family-forming practices and the image of the role model same-sex nuclear family promoted in queer communities, I stress the dynamic interplay of socio-economical class, state law and moral values that come to articulate queer family relations and relatedness in today's queer everyday lives.

The major part of my fieldwork was conducted in Shenzhen, the well-known city of migrants in Guangdong Province, China. Located on the southeast coast, Shenzhen is the city that links Hong Kong and mainland China. Within an hour's train ride from Shenzhen, Guangzhou is the capital city of Guangdong Province, also attracting thousands of migrants each year. Both Shenzhen and Guangzhou belong to the Pearl River Delta Metropolitan Region, the largest economic hub in China. Here I highlight the internal regional variation within China rather than seeing Chinese society through a rural/urban comparison, as each region has its unique cultural history that has shaped and continues to shape queer personal lives. The prominent urban areas in Southeast Coast China became my chosen site for exploring the interplay of urban utopian imaginaries and queer kinship. Indeed, first-tier cities like Shenzhen have become a destination for young non-heterosexual people who are attracted by the promise of better opportunities, metropolitan anonymity, and sexual freedom (Luo 2020). Yet, such queer utopian imaginaries of cosmopolitan life have been questioned in recent anthropological literature (Sorainen 2015, Boyce & Dasgupta 2017). This research finds that rising living expenses and the

constricting possibilities for upward mobility have inevitably shaped young queer subjects' material desires, relationships with their parents, careers, marriage and parenting choices, and future aspirations.

The focus of my research has arisen as a result of my ongoing academic interests and close involvement in Chinese queer communities. The discontinuity between studies on Chinese queer life-worlds and on Chinese kinship demonstrated in the literature review is notable. Studies on Chinese non-heterosexual people and domestic quantitative research on Chinese families have tended to reduce kinship to blood ties and traditional cultures, while anthropological studies on Chinese kinship have suggested a turn to understanding Chinese kinship as a fluid and malleable concept (Stafford 2000, Brandtstädter & Santos 2008). My experience with and previous research on queer women in China urged me to investigate relatedness in China as well as the transnationality of queer theory. My research makes an original contribution to the studies of parenthood and new reproductive technologies of Chinese non-heterosexual people in the context of our understanding of kinship and Chinese society in general. My research also contributes to the discussion on queer utopian imaginaries and futurity that is related to reproduction, cosmopolitan life, and family care (Edelman 2004, Muñoz 2009, Boyce & Dasgupta 2017).

In the following subsections of this chapter, I will first delineate the historical and social-legal context of Chinese non-normative sexualities, market reforms, and family life in general. Then, I will discuss the relevant literature on the anthropology of kinship, queer studies, and post-reform Chinese society to locate my research on queer kinship in urban China. This is followed by an outline of the structure of the thesis.

Scope and Context

Same-sex sexualities and intimate relationships

The historical documents of same-sex desire and romance in China are as ancient as China itself. Ancient literature has documented homosexual practices ranging from having *luanrong* (catamite) in imperial families to *nanchang* (male prostitutes) among city dwellers. Although male homoerotic behaviours were believed to be tolerated in ancient China, it is crucial to note two facts: one is the coexistence of homosexual erotic relations and heterosexual marriage; the other is the absence of female homosexuality in ancient

Chinese literature (Hinsch 1990, Sang 2003, Li 2009, Ho 2010). Despite any belief that it was tolerated, homosexuality was in a marginalised position in ancient Chinese culture, “existing as peripheral to the gendered hierarchies of the Confucian family and marriage institutions” (Kong 2010:151). Traditional Confucian³ values place little weight on conjugal relations and pay no attention to love among women. The youth had little autonomy, especially young women. With the philosophy of *Jiaguotonggou* (cohesion/pan-familism), Confucianists believed that filial duty in the family could be applied to the wider society; a person needed to be *xiao* (filial) to family elders first and expand filial piety to other elders and ultimately to the nation (An et al. 2013, Wang, Q 2011, Wang, P 2010). In traditional China (pre-19th century), marriage was arranged by family elders and was viewed as a corporate relationship between two families rather than an individual matter.

Throughout the last century, discourses of sexuality in China became “the site of cultural production in discrepant dialogue with Western power” (Rofel 2007:95). It is widely believed that the penetration of Western imperialism in the late Qing Dynasty (1840-1911) imported a scientific discourse of gender and Western homophobia into China (Ho 2010). During the Republican period (1912-1949), especially the May Fourth decade (1915-1927), China experienced a significant change in gender and sexual conceptions that associated same-sex intimacy with psychobiological abnormality (Sang 2003). From late Imperial China to the Republican period, male homosexual relationships, in the form of sodomy (*jijian*)⁴, became legal and moral concerns. The discourse of homosexuality and sexuality was erased from the public sphere until the late 1970s. The state strictly regulated sexual activities to be within marriage.

Chinese economic reform began in 1978 when the *gaige kaifang* (reform and opening-up) policy was passed. Since then, collective interest has been de-emphasised and individual mobility has increased. After the reform period, the public discourse of homosexuality increased dramatically (Kam 2013, Ho 2010, Rofel 2007). The appearance of terms such as ‘*tongxinglian*’ (homosexual), ‘*tongzhi*’ (‘comrades’, roughly referring to LGBT

³ Confucianism has been regarded as the most influential ideology in China for over two millennia. It became the official state ideology in the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD).

⁴ Sodomy (*jijian*) appeared as a crime in late Qing Dynasty law. Until 1997, sodomy was implicitly included in hooliganism (*liumang xingwei*) under the old criminal law.

people), ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ in public media and on the internet has helped non-heterosexual people from urban and rural areas to express their sexualities. Urbanisation and increased geographical mobility have led to the emergence of same-sex communities in major Chinese cities (Kam 2013).

In 1997, homosexuality was excluded from legal prosecution through the abolishment of the category of hooliganism (*liumang xingwei*) under the old criminal law, which had previously included male homosexual activities. In 2001, the Chinese Psychiatry Association removed homosexuality (*tongxinglian*) from the medical category of ‘perversions’. Although these two changes are often regarded as signifying the decriminalisation and de-pathologization of (male) homosexual behaviours, Chinese non-heterosexual people face continual surveillance and repression (Zheng 2015). To date, many Chinese universities still use textbooks that define homosexuality as ‘abnormal’ or as ‘mental illness’, and the publishers of these textbooks refuse to make any change. No domestic law protects gender and sexual minorities. On the one hand, same-sex romance has become a pop topic in mass media and online communities. On the other hand, male homosexuality is almost always linked to the high risk of HIV in public discourse, while female homosexuality is often ignored or not acknowledged (Kam 2013, Sang 2003). Despite the fact that online surveys often show increasing awareness and acceptance toward homosexuality, a recent survey conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (2016) suggests that, although the public attitude toward same-sex relationships has been changing for the good, especially among the younger generation⁵, non-heterosexual people remain invisible and vulnerable within society, with only 5% of them willing to live openly. For most non-heterosexual people, no matter what gender and sexual desires they have, there is still a strong injunction for them to be in a heterosexual marriage and have children.

Modernisation and internal migration since the economic reform

The power-holding stratum in China has shifted remarkably from the Mao era (1949-1976) to the post-Mao era (1976-1989) (He 2000, Anagnost 2008). During the Mao era, China was highly unified and centralised; the Communist Party of China monopolized all kinds of resources, including material resources like land, property, income, political

⁵ 77% of survey respondents are post-90s, 19.4% are post-80s, only 3.6% are post-70s or older.

resources of power, and cultural resources like education (He 2000: 69). It should also be noted that, during the Mao era, not only sexual desires but individual desires in general could not be openly celebrated in public.

In 1976, Deng Xiaoping (paramount leader from 1978 to 1989) proclaimed that the contradiction was no longer between classes but between “the backward and the advanced forces of production” (Osburg 2013:4). One of Deng’s most famous sayings is to “let some people, some areas get rich first, and eventually all”. Consequently, reform and opening policy was passed in 1978, marked as the beginning of market reforms. Independent household businesses first appeared in the early 1980s as small shops, restaurants, etc. The enormous potential of profit-making and the increasing foreign investment attracted people from various backgrounds to enter the market economy. The development of the private sector has led to the rise of the ‘enterprising/desiring self’, which is expressed and maintained mostly in terms of individual desires and self-interests and is, at the same time, brought under the restraining power of the Chinese state through the language of neoliberalism (Rofel 2007, Kleinman et al. 2011). As a double-edged sword, the economic reform has contributed to the growth of individual mobility and simultaneously formed unequal social strata (Anagnost 2008). The middle class (*zhongchan jieceng*) is a small but growing emerging stratum in China made possible by privatization (Zhang 2008). Yet, it is not a coherent group but a “diverse array of different social positions with differing degrees of power and affluence” (Anagnost 2008:507).

The emergence of market economy and the relaxation of the household registration (*hukou*) system since the 1980s have contributed to a rural-to-urban migration surge. China’s *hukou* system was formally set up in the 1950s. From the 1950s to the early 1980s, internal migration was tightly controlled under the *hukou* system. Each citizen is required to register in one and only one place of permanent residence (*hukou suozaidi*) with either agricultural or non-agricultural status (*hukou leibie*) (Chan & Zhang 1999). The *hukou* residence links one’s accessibility to a wide range of state-provided benefits and opportunities such as public schooling, healthcare, housing, and eligibility to work in state sectors. Until the late 1980s, anyone wishing to travel within China had to obtain an official ‘permission’ letter from local officials. Changing *hukou* residence and status was extremely difficult (Bao et al. 2011). Since the late 1980s, Chinese cities began to issue temporary resident permits to migrants and gradually eased the restrictions on the in-

migration of rural workers. The economic and *hukou* reforms considerably encouraged labour mobility. The temporary (or ‘floating’) population away from their *hukou* residence had increased from 6.1 million in 1982 to 149.4 million in 2005 (Shen 2013). The four first-tier cities - Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen - are the most popular cities for migrants in China.

Shenzhen is the youngest and smallest city among the four first-tier Chinese cities, being as it was merely an ‘uncultured’ fishing village of 30,000 people three decades ago. As part of its reform and opening-up plan, China established Special Economic Zones (SEZs), including Shenzhen. The increased social mobility and the growing number of migrants have contributed to the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in Shenzhen. Despite the high housing prices, Shenzhen’s policies and job opportunities attracted nearly 500,000 new citizens in 2016 (excluding residents who did not obtain official citizenship). By 2017, Shenzhen had 4.3 million permanent registered citizens, while the total permanent population, including migrants without local *hukou*, was 12.5 million (Shenzhen Municipal Bureau of Statistics 2018). Shenzhen released its famous slogan in 2012, ‘*laile jiushi shenzhenren* (once you come here, you are a Shenzhenener)’. Growing vigorously, Shenzhen has had numerous nicknames: ‘mushroom/instant city’ for its rapid growth, ‘Chinese Silicon Valley’ for its renowned high-tech industry, and ‘cultural desert’ for its lack of cultural history. It also attracts the greatest number of young university graduates in China⁶. Shenzhen is undoubtedly an ideal site for exploring the interplay of queer kinship and queer migration.

Marriage, parenting, and family transformations

To understand the pressure to marry that Chinese non-heterosexual people face, we need to find out what marriage, cohabitation, and childrearing mean in contemporary Chinese society. Since 1949, parental authority has weakened and arranged marriage has become rare in rural and urban China. The shift in control over the decision to marry from parents to young people was promoted by the Communist Party of China, both explicitly through the introduction of the Marriage Act of 1950 (and 1980) and indirectly through encouraging women into the job market (Pimentel 2000). The average age of a first

⁶This is based on the Tencent company’s report. Tencent is one of the largest Internet companies, offering services including the well-known instant messenger QQ and the mobile chatting application Wechat.

marriage and the divorce rate has risen since then⁷. The younger generation in mainland China now enjoys more autonomy and values romantic love and freedom of marriage. Moreover, women's social and economic status has improved since 1949, shown in the rapidly growing percentages of women receiving postsecondary education (Xie 2013). The one-child policy introduced in 1979 has also played a critical role in improving urban daughters' status (Fong 2007). In the traditional patrilineal kinship system, parents tended to invest in sons rather than daughters. Being the one and only child who is expected to support her parents in the future, urban daughters have access to more emotional and material support than daughters with siblings. In a word, the traditional disadvantaged identity categories of women and young people have gained increased individual freedom. Nevertheless, parents are still involved in spouse choice and married lives (Pimentel 2000; Li 2011b). Surveys have shown that parental approval is still a crucial factor in marital quality (ibid). Social hypergamy - the tendency of women to marry men of higher social and economic status - remains a cultural expectation for women (Xie 2013). Furthermore, singlehood remains extremely rare⁸. Heterosexual marriage is still the dominant preference in Chinese society. Consequently, youths may have increased freedom to choose whom to marry, but they may not have such freedom to choose not to marry at all.

At the same time, intimate relationships outside marriage have been transforming. Premarital cohabitation was once regarded as an immoral and illegal practice in socialist China. The China Family Panel Study has shown a dramatic rise in premarital cohabitation rates from nearly absent before the 1980s to one-third in 2010-2012 (Yu & Xie 2015). One reason for this is the change in the Marriage Law that decriminalised the practice of cohabitation⁹. Urbanisation and migrational experience are also important factors. While Yu and Xie's data on cohabitation is limited to married couples born before 1980, a trend in social acceptance toward cohabitation and premarital sex is pronounced. Various scholars have described the sexual revolution during the last three decades (Pan 1995, Kleinman et al. 2011, Zhang 2011). The emergence of dating culture in urban China has increasingly delinked sex from marriage as the relationship between sex, romantic

⁷ Others have argued that the transformation of family and marriage in China began earlier in the 1920s when the May Fourth liberating Movement took place (Lee 2006).

⁸ For the birth cohort of 1976–83, almost every woman had been married by age 30; and by age 33, over 95% of men had entered their first marriage. Available in *Chinese General Social Surveys* 2010, 2012, and 2013.

⁹ The Chinese Marriage Law of 1980 referred to cohabitation as “illegal cohabitation,” while a 2001 amendment to the law changed the wording to “non-marital cohabitation”.

love, and companionate love is constantly being negotiated by young urbanites (Jankowiak & Li 2017). Nevertheless, cohabitation is not legally protected¹⁰. Also, the tolerant attitude toward cohabitation may still only be within the territory of marriage, as cohabitation is considered a temporal and transitional status before getting married¹¹. Long-term cohabiting relationships are rare (Yeung & Hu 2016). It remains questionable whether cohabitation is accepted as a form of union among people in urban China. The question is pronounced in non-heterosexual cohabiting couples, for they cannot ‘develop’ their cohabiting relationships to legal marriage. At the same time, their experiences are different from heterosexual cohabiting couples, for they may not necessarily be recognised as cohabiting couples within a heteronormative perspective.

Childbirth and parenting in China are tightly associated with its socio-cultural emphasis on reproduction and unique birth planning policies (Handwerker 2002; Klein 2017). Filial duty (*xiao*), as the moral standard in Confucian China, focuses on the continuation of the family line (Ikels 2004). In this sense, reproduction is a family duty bonded with marriage. In 1979, the state introduced the one-child policy to restrict births per household, and it was replaced by the two-child policy in 2015. The Population and Family Planning Law became effective on 1 September 2002. Many other administrative issues, such as the enforcement of social maintenance fees¹², are directly related to the state’s strict birth planning project (Jiang & Liu 2016). In 2001, the Ministry of Health issued two orders to regulate the use of assisted reproductive technologies (ART) and sperm banks. They came in line with the Population and Family Planning Law, meaning that ART, including IUI (intrauterine insemination, also known as artificial insemination), and IVF (In Vitro Fertilization), were only available to married infertile couples. Meanwhile, the orders prohibit surrogacy and trading of human sperm, eggs, and embryos. According to the Ministry of Health, medical personnel must not apply ART to married couples and unmarried women who do not comply with the state’s planned birth project.

¹⁰ Even though cohabiting partners were included in the Anti-Domestic Violence Law of the People's Republic in 2015, the definition of a cohabiting partner is vague and same-sex cohabiting relationships are not included. This law doesn't specify the department to enforce the policies either.

¹¹ Studies shows that the duration of cohabitation in Chinese society is still shorter than Western societies.

¹² In 2002, the State Council of the People's Republic of China promulgated the measures for administration of collection of social maintenance fees. Social maintenance fee is a euphemism for fines as a punishment for excess/unplanned births and is used for the operation of grassroots governments. It was previously called ‘fines for excess birth’ and ‘out-of-quota birth fees’. The exact amount of social maintenance fee is decided by local family planning commissions and can be extremely high.

Moreover, recent national surveys indicate that out-of-wedlock childbirths remain almost non-existent partly because of the governmental control over the household registration (*hukou*) system (Xie 2013). One must have a *hukou* certificate identifying personal details including name, date of birth, family members and residence to be legally recognised as a Chinese citizen and receive necessary welfares and the right to go to school. Without two parents who are legally married and complying with the family planning policy, the newborn cannot be registered in a household booklet (*hukou ben*) and thus risk becoming legal nonpersons (Greenhalgh 2003). To get *hukou* for out-of-wedlock children, unmarried parents often have to pay a high social maintenance fee.

Although there is a trend toward the nuclear family, strong parent-child bonds and the high percentage of elders co-residing/living close with their children are still remarkable in urban China¹³ (Li 2011, Tang & Chen 2012, Xie 2013). Family care remains the main model for elderly support. A significant number of elderly people still count on their children for support due to the patrilocal tradition and the lack of public support (2013:7). Simultaneously, the one-child policy has placed familial pressure solely on the only child, who is expected to excel in school, have a decent job, get married, continue the family line, and take the primary responsibility for supporting the family elders. We must note that the average non-heterosexual person born under the one-child policy is often an only child who has no siblings to share the burden to care for parents and cannot be legally bound with a same-sex lover (Hildebrandt 2018). Since elderly care is strongly dependent on kinship norms under the current welfare system, not having children can be a profound concern when considering the future and old age.

To summarise, quantitative research to date has demonstrated apparent paradoxes in the changing values and practices of marriage and family. On the one hand, there is a growing pursuit of individual freedoms when it comes to love, intimacy, and marriage. On the other hand, entering heterosexual marriage remains a dominant life choice tightly associated with parenting. Long-term cohabitating relationships and non-marital childbirths remain extremely rare for cultural and legal reasons. Old age support is still

¹³ Research shows that about 43 percent of elderly persons aged 60 and above co-reside with a child, another 31 percent have a child living in the same neighbourhood, and 13 percent more in the same county but not in the same neighbourhood. Data also shows a high frequency of financial transfers between elderly parents and their children (Lei et al. 2013, cited in Xie 2013).

expected to be provided primarily by one's offspring. These paradoxes imply a difficult situation for alternative life choices, including queer relationships and family formation. At the same time, it is crucial to study the actual practices behind the official data.

The practice of *xinghun* marriage and queer parenting

One of the popular strategies often discussed in Chinese same-sex communities is *xinghun* (contract) marriage, which is also called 'marriage of convenience' between a gay man and a lesbian. According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme (2016), non-heterosexual people generally marry less than straight people of the same age, but the pressure to get married and the marriage rate increases as non-heterosexual people grow older. Among the LGBT respondents, 0.6% of post-90s are married, 13.5% of post-80s are married and 42.7% of post-70s are married. 84.1% of married LGBT respondents are married to heterosexual people, 13.2% are in a "marriage of convenience" with opposite-sex non-heterosexual people, and 2.6% are in same-sex marriages registered in foreign countries (24). In the case of *xinghun*, the husband (who usually identify as a gay man) and the wife (who usually identify as a lesbian) do not marry for romantic love, but mainly for the purpose of releasing tensions between individual freedom and familial duty (Engebretsen 2017). The recognition of kinship through state law, blood ties and love are complicated in this practice of 'faking' marriage. Some non-heterosexual people simultaneously co-parent with their opposite-sex *xinghun* partners, show filial piety to their *xinghun* parents-in-law, and date same-sex lovers. The intricate relationships they have with their same-sex lovers, their *xinghun* partners and extended families both complicate and destabilise the concept of the conventional Chinese family. In this sense, the boundary between 'conventional/normative' and 'alternative/queer' forms of family and kinship seems to be vague as the practice of *xinghun* marriage creates not singular but multiple 'truths' and perspectives. In this thesis, I explore non-heterosexual people's practice of *xinghun* marriage beyond the scope of marriage pressure, as *xinghun* marriage is often linked with parenting. As I will explore in chapter 4, non-heterosexual people in *xinghun* marriage struggle to walk the blurred line between the concept of a 'nominal' and 'real' family.

While same-sex marriage has not gained legal recognition in mainland China and childbirth outside marriage has been strictly restricted, non-heterosexual people with children have gradually become visible in online communities as well as in professional

agencies which assist non-heterosexual people in having children through assisted reproductive technologies such as in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and surrogacy. Here, queer parenting can involve a diverse range of tactics and outcomes. For example, a Chinese gay couple living in Shenzhen became co-parents by contracting with a surrogate agency in Russia. They had a child using one man's sperm and a Russian model's egg, and the child was carried by a surrogate from Thailand. This couple (An and Ye)'s case will be further explained in chapter 3 and 6. Under existing legal policies, one of the gay co-parents would be neither biologically related to the child nor married to his lover. Studying parenthood which is not recognisable by alleged biology or law furthers our understanding of kinship, a concept that has been destabilised and denaturalised by anthropologists such as Strathern (1992a&b), Weston (1991), Latour (1993), Carsten (2000), and Franklin (2013). Since Chinese non-heterosexual people are scarcely imagined as being able to form enduring relationships that can reproduce and establish families, queer parents remain invisible to the general public, and social research into such practices is especially limited. Such an absence of research into Chinese queer parenting in the social sciences is connected to the lack of these relationships' wider representation in Chinese society and the heteronormative perspective that dominates mainstream social studies.

Against this background, this research explores the tactics non-heterosexual people employ to have children with or without entering heterosexual marriage and their experience of validating (or losing) kinship relations through their negotiation with biological relatives and state legislation. In examining these tactics, this research creates a new ethnographic perspective for the anthropology of kinship in China. Also, the ART business sectors that assist non-heterosexual people in having children reveals links between Chinese sexualness and the transnational economic market, as the high costs and duration needed for IVF and surrogacy automatically make economic capital a prerequisite for intended clients. Overall, queer personal lives in contemporary China reveal discursive and affective tensions between tradition and modernity, individualism and collectivism, blood ties and chosen families, romantic love and moral duties, localism and globalism.

Literature Review

Gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity

It is essential to clarify the conceptions and uses of ‘sex’, ‘gender’, ‘heterosexuality’, and ‘heteronormativity’ as they form the basis of queer theory and this research. During the last century, the essentialist view of sex, gender, and sexuality as binary distinctions and natural facts have been challenged by feminism and lesbian/gay studies. De Beauvoir (1953) distinguishes gender from sex as she points out that one’s body is sexed, yet sex doesn’t cause gender, and gender cannot be used to express sex. Gender is a social construct that cannot be naturalised. Butler writes, “Whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed; hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (1990: 9). Foucault (1984) discusses the construction of knowledge of sexuality within institutions. For Foucault, the body gains meaning only in the context of discursive power relations both produced and undermined by discourse. Nowadays, many scholars would agree that sexuality and gender are historically and socially constructed (e.g., Sullivan 2003). ‘Sex’ can refer both to anatomical differences between female and male (as the ‘two sexes’) and to erotic relations and practices (as to ‘have sex’). The ambiguous meanings of sex as identity and as act become divided into “univocal dimensions” in feminist and lesbian/gay analysis (Butler 1994:4). Rubin suggests theorising sexuality as an autonomous realm as she argues the two meanings of ‘sex’, whereby to be a sex implies having sex in a given way that reflects a heterosexist cultural assumption that “sexuality is reducible to sexual intercourse and that it is a function of the relations between women and men” (1984:169). Drawing from Rubin’s critique, Butler makes it clear that sexuality cannot be reduced to sexual intercourse, and sexual relations cannot be reduced to gender positions. Gender and sexuality are “empirically interrelated, but analytically distinct”, with heterosexuality as the key site of intersection (Jackson 2005: 17).

Butler (1990) questions the binary of masculinity and femininity and formulates the theory of performativity. A central concept of her work is that gender is not a seamlessly stable identity but rather an identity tenuously established in time and “instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (1990:179). The social audience and the actors themselves both believe in the constructed identity and perform in the modes of belief. For Butler, the very concepts of masculinity and femininity are constructed as a technique to conceal gender performative attributes and possibilities that might proliferate the meaning of gender outside the frames of compulsory heterosexuality and

heteronormativity. Thus, people who do their gender ‘wrongly’ are punished by culture and laws that have a vested interest in maintaining the strict distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality, masculinity and femininity (2004:93). Butler also discusses the relation between polluting status and homophobia as male homosexuality implies a kind of body permeability that is unauthorised by the hegemonic heterosexual order. A person with AIDS was identified with a polluting status due to not only AIDS’s figure as ‘gay disease’, but also the media’s homophobic response to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s (Watney 1988). As China experiences an emerging HIV epidemic among men who have sex with men (MSM), public health sectors turn specifically to targeting MSM testing and detection for HIV intervention (Fan 2017). Despite the low risk of HIV infection, female homosexuality is linked with this polluted status, for it is outside the hegemonic order. Informed by Hegel (1978)’s dialectics and his conceptions of sublation (*aufhebung*) and negation, Butler (1990) argues that heterosexuality is a complex matrix of discourse that requires something to negate and sublate. Hence, in order for heterosexuality to remain integral as a distinct social norm, the very notion of homosexuality needs to be constructed to remain repressed as a taboo (edited with Salih 2004). In this sense, heterosexuality, in fact, always presupposes homosexuality to ensure its own originality and normativity. Intrinsic is the relationship between sexual subjectivities, discourse, and power. Sedgwick suggests prohibition/repression is vital for Foucault (1984), obstructing the possibility of understanding human desire as structured quite differently from “the heroic, ‘liberatory,’ inescapably dualistic righteousness of hunting down and attacking prohibition/repression in all its chameleonic guises” (Sedgwick 2003: 10, cited in Boyce 2008:117). To summarise, heterosexuality is a “(historically and culturally specific) truth-effect of systems of power/knowledge” and “its dominant position and current configuration are contestable and open to change” (Sullivan 2003:29). Homosexuality and heterosexuality are constructed in a “reciprocal, but hierarchical, relationship” (Jackson 2005:23).

The emergence of queer theory in the early 1990s primarily developed by Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and other influential theorists has indeed contributed to the denaturalisation of the masculinity/femininity divide and destabilisation of the notions of the normal and normative. Heteronormativity is not a fixed term, but a changing set of discourses that “is mobilized and reproduced in everyday life not only through talk, but also through routine activities in which gender, sexuality and heterosexuality interconnect”

(Jackson 2016: 114). Lunsin (1999) points out that homophobia in Japanese society is internalised in children at an early age before they know about the existence of homosexuality. Such homophobia, then, is not rooted in the knowledge of sexuality but in fear of being different. In other words, we cannot reduce heteronormativity to the discourses of sexual practice, for it defines “not only a normative sexual practice but also a normal way of life” (Jackson 2016: 107). Since heteronormativity itself is constructed in contrast to non-normative sexualities, its stability is constantly threatened by queer theories and practices. Although heteronormativity has been well-theorised, Traub points out that there is “a tendency to use the term ‘heteronormativity’ to describe earlier system of sexuality and gender”, which seems to make heterosexuality and heteronormativity ahistorical and universal (2008:23). Many scholars thus employ ‘heteronormativity’ and ‘heterosexuality’ with little reflection on “what they mean for their historical period” (ibid). Queer theory should be seen as dynamic and mobilising. In light of such arguments, we need to rethink when and how the social ordering of gender, sexuality, and are heterosexuality produced and probably transformed in the Chinese context to avoid oversimplified preconceptions of what heteronormativity is. Thus, I don’t take heteronormativity or the heteronormative family as universally self-explanatory notions. I will move to discuss the critiques on universalist and essentialist views of queer cultures in non-Euro-American contexts as this research encompasses globalised queer culture and Chinese queer practices.

Between global queer culture, modernity, and locality

If gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity are discursively constructed and culturally specific notions, how do we apply queer identities and queer theories to studies in the local context? What is the relation between queer theory and China? Altman (1996) suggests that, as non-normative sexual subjects in non-Western societies imagine themselves in the globalised gay and lesbian communities, their experiences can differ from those in the West. The notions of gay and lesbian identities and cultures are frequently claimed to be universal in non-Euro-American countries, whereas extensive ethnographic research has challenged both the universalist view of gay and lesbian identities and the essentialist view of ‘Oriental/Asian cultures’ (Blackwood 2005, Bose & Bhattacharyya 2007, Boellstorff 2007a&b, Boyce 2008, Osella 2012, Dave 2012, Mizielińska & Stasińska 2017). Boellstorff discusses how nation-states “make underwriting normative heterosexuality central to their practices of governance and

ideologies of belonging” (2007b: 22). Dave points out the two social facts: “the Western imperative to make of queerness a political identity” and “the local reality of the incommensurability of queerness with religion or nation” (2012:15). Looking into same-sex intimacy among Muslim men in South India, Osella argues that “processes that lead to the normalization of heterosexuality are neither linear and singular nor predictable in their outcomes” (2012:544). Grewal and Kaplan further identify the re-emergence of the tradition-modernity split in the public discourse on sexuality, in which “the United States and Europe are figured as modern and thus as the sites of progressive social movements, while other parts of the world are presumed to be traditional, especially in regard to sexuality” (2001:669). Wilson (2006) recognises the conflation of ‘Western’, ‘modern’ and ‘globalisation’ as the source of sexual modernity in Asia societies. Under such Western hegemony, queer life and practices that don’t correspond to the first-world model are described as ‘tradition’. Boyce and Dasgupta (2017) have made visible the relation between Indian modernity and queer desires. In short, scholars considering cultural universalism or the westernisation of queer cultures argue that the universal imagining of being queer tends to place non-normative gender and sexual minorities from the non-West in a “forever late arrived” and less developed position. In this sense of West-East dualism, the East either rejects or takes up Western queer theories. Yet, the goal is not to put non-heterosexual people in a West-East binary in order to find differences, since “the very language of difference may naturalize and justify the ‘West’ as an indispensable and normative point of comparison” (Liu 2010:314). Borrowing from Boyce, Engebretsen, and Posocco, queer anthropological work aims to explore “how ethno-theoretical approaches to sexual and gender diversity might contribute to rethinking mainstream anthropological analysis” (2018:5).

Doing cross-cultural research meets the challenge of dealing with representations of terminologies in different cultures. Traub writes: “as sexual categories and epistemologies travel across borders, all efforts at cross-cultural translation and comparison are imbued with politically loaded significations of tradition and modernity” (2008:9). Khanna (2017) points out that the sense of sexuality as an aspect of personhood and the epistemology of homosexuality are partial and ultimately unhelpful frames for understanding sexual possibilities in non-Euro-American contexts. Rather, we shall develop an understanding toward ‘sexualness’ that unsettles the overarching framework of sexuality types (ibid). Scholars need not only pay attention to cross-cultural translation but must also be

extremely careful with the local cultural meanings of imported vocabularies. The term ‘lesbian’ and the term ‘dogana’ in Indian society can evoke different ontologies and idioms of sexualness (Khanna 2017). Many researchers choose to avoid overusing the English terms ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ to represent gender and sexual minorities in non-Euro-American societies. Chou (1997), for example, has argued that the Chinese term ‘*tongzhi*’ (literally meaning ‘comrades’, also referring to LGBT people) is different from the English ‘gays and lesbians’ because the concepts of gay and lesbian “have no equivalent in the Chinese tradition of same-sex erotic relations, which is characterized by cultural tolerance and harmony” (cited in Liu 2010:297). Yet, rejecting terms originated from Euro-American contexts entirely and emphasising cultural specificity could also risk essentializing both the ‘East’ and the ‘West’. As Bose and Bhattacharyya (2007) contend, the meanings of the categories of gender and sexuality “shift according to historical, cultural and social context” and the question is “ultimately ethnographic and historic rather than purely theoretical” (xxiv). As I stated at the beginning of this thesis, these English or Chinese terms shouldn’t be understood as culturally static identities that speak for certain ‘types of person’. This research doesn’t conceptualise ‘gay and lesbian’ as a globalised modern culture, nor does it conceptualise ‘*tongzhi* and *lala*’ as representing an authentic Chinese culture. After all, the ‘West’ and the Euro-American sexual categorisation are not seamlessly stable, and the purpose is to relativise “Western’ paradigmatic knowledge in the study of gender and sexual diversity” (Boyce, Engebretsen, & Posocco, 2018:847). In employing the idiom of ‘sexualness’ beyond the framework of sexuality types, I wish to problematise the modern-versus-tradition dichotomy and West-versus-East essentialist comparison. This research employs a standpoint derived from Chinese queer relations to critique the heteronormative approach to anthropology as well as to decolonise/decentralise the dominant framework of sexuality in queer studies (Hendriks 2018, Khanna 2017).

Queer futurity

The focus of my research is linked to queer relationality, reproduction and ultimately debates surrounding the queer anti-social thesis and queer futurity. Is there a future for non-heterosexual people? Following Bersani’s definition of sex as “anticommunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing, antiloving” (1986:215) is the anti-social, negative, and anti-relational turn in queer theories fuelled by Lee Edelman. The conception of politics, as Edelman (2004) suggests, is linked to what he calls ‘reproductive futurism’ embodied in

the figure of the child. In this sense, future is reduced to repetition. Fighting for the future is equated with 'fighting for children', while queerness "names the side of those not 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism" (2004:3). Then, the queer subject embraces a negativity which chafes against normalisation and resists every social form (6). Edelman thus says, "there are no non-heterosexual people in that future as there can be no future for non-heterosexual people [...] what is queerest about us, queerest within us, and queerest despite us is this willingness to insist intransitively - to insist that the future stop here" (30-31). Edelman articulates an anti-social thesis that frames non-heterosexual people as heroic and radical norm-resisters, which Halberstam (2008) argues as incorrect. Unfolding tensions between same-sex and gender variant traditions of queer activism and identification, Halberstam demonstrates that homosexuality has not always and everywhere been negative, resistant, and progressive. He depicts homophile movements in the 1920s in Germany which made notable distinctions between male effeminacy and female masculinity. In this sense, the masculinist homophile movements in fact emphasised male superiority and repressed gender variant men. Halberstam points out that Edelman's version of anti-social theory is apolitical rather than anti-politics.

Responding to the anti-relational stance, Muñoz (2009) suggests that queerness is also performative, meaning it is not only being but also doing for and toward future (1). For Muñoz, the potentiality of cross-temporal queer relationality promises futurity, and queerness should be understood as collectivity. He argues that gay and lesbian's pursuit for traditional straight relationality (such as marriage) is an ideological project rather than a pragmatic strategy that tries to naturalise straight relationality. Muñoz criticises the conceptualisation of 'here and now' of straight present and instead points out the multiple temporalities and spatiality of queerness. Queerness's time is a "stepping out of the linearity of straight time" (25). Thus, the notion of straight time should not be naturalised. By identifying the web of queer relationality and collective futurism in performances, artwork, and his own experience, Muñoz voices a turn to hope, future, and utopia.

Patel (2006) argues that sexuality has too often be considered outside transnational

finance and eco-sustainability. She compares the rate card¹⁴ agreement between the middle-class heterosexual family and *Aravani* (eunuchs)¹⁵ to the technology of risk. The rate card mediates a ‘future’ of uncertainty that resonates with insurance in neoliberal reform. People who buy into the idea of life insurance also buy into ideas of what kind of life they want, strategies for protecting against risk and conceptions of sexuality and selfhood. Revealing the advertisements and policies, Patel writes, “as people learn to purchase and to want insurance, the form of the implicitly heterosexual, explicitly nuclear family that the policy buys and protects is naturalized” (2006:37). Patel suggests that through risk pooling, risk becomes “a form of universal arbiter of value”, pitting one kind of risk against another kind of risk, one group against another group (52). Through the analysis of risk, insurance, and equity, Patel reveals that the good neoliberal citizen, as an enterprise, cares for oneself and ensures a good sustainable life against risk by investing in future. In neoliberal economies, selfhood is understood through the language of risk, credit, and equity. Therefore, Patel suggests a turn to rethink ‘self’ through concepts of fullness and care, life and futurity.

Theorists of the future of non-heterosexual people have demonstrated a tension between anti-relational and collectivity, risk and sustainability, negativity and hope. The debates over queer futures are inspiring for inviting researchers to critically think outside of the ‘straight present’ and think, instead, of the ‘then and there’ for queerness that are the temporality and spatiality of queer lives. It is also helpful for this research to not assume queer parenting as the only viable future or risk as the universal arbiter of value.

In the Chinese context, it is worth exploring how the state embeds the notions of risk and future into family planning policies such as the one-child policy (1979-2015) and the two-child policy (2015-present). The figure of the child and the state regulation on reproduction are indeed embedded in queer kinship practices. How is the ‘future’ produced in China? To what extent does the figure of the child interrelate with the ideals of queer futurity? By exploring the practice of conjugal love and (assisted) reproduction

¹⁴ The rate card is a familiar feature of an Indian cityscape which lists fixed price for services rendered and is considered ‘a gentlemen’s agreement’. On 1 March 2004, a prominent Calcutta newspaper showed a list of prices given to *Aravani* in three ceremonies, “Fixed cost: For birth of a boy: Rs. 3001, for birth of a girl: Rs. 1,501 and for a wedding: Rs. 3501” (cited in Patel 2006: 25).

¹⁵ *Aravani* (eunuchs, also known as third gender or *hijras*) in India show at ceremonies to sing, dance and offer blessings in return for a desirable amount of money.

and the image of the perfect queer family in Chinese queer communities, this ethnography brings queer kinship and queer futurity together.

'New' kinship studies and new reproductive technologies

Traditionally, anthropologists have tended to focus on the discourse of 'natural facts' such as lineage systems (biological) and marriage (affinal), which were seen as the root of kinship. Also, kinship was studied in small-scale societies, where it seemed to have bounded structures. Kinship was the study of reproduction rather than connection (Strathern 1992a). The Euro-American tradition of conflating kinship with blood relations is criticised by Schneider, as he points out the idea of kinship is not understood in all cultures to be the same and is not grounded by 'natural facts' everywhere (1984, cited in Carsten 2000:25). The biological facts don't form the ground of social relations in every society. Carsten (2000) points out that kinship lost its ground most obviously to gender as the naturalisation of gender difference has been challenged (see also Collier & Yanagisako 1987, Butler 1990, Butler 1993). As the division of biological and social facts appeared in the discussion of kinship, it has become clear that kinship is not reducible to biology. Nature, which has been viewed as pre-existing biological facts 'discovered' by people, seems to be separated from culture, which has been viewed as social knowledge 'constructed' by people. Yet, nature is constructed, though it is claimed to be discovered (Latour 1993:31). By exploring the use of new reproductive technologies in the Thatcher political era which were seen as both enabling nature and interference with nature, Strathern analytically blurs the boundaries of nature and technology and clarifies that nature can no longer be taken for granted in modern English society. The very ground for nature to be seen as a distinct domain from culture has become questionable as nature needs to be protected by technology. Kinship, as Strathern puts it, is the place of overlap, the meeting place of nature and culture. In this sense, kinship is no longer a biological fact in varying social forms but a "complex, hybrid process of establishing relations of proximity not separable from the most general phenomenon of intimacy and relatedness" (Brandtstädter & Santos 2008:9). Ultimately, "there is no truly authentic anthropological modelling of local cultures and relatedness" (Carsten 2000: 34).

Since the early 20th century, the proliferation of new reproductive technologies has complicated the study of kinship and seemingly made English society a "less nature, more technology" oriented one (Strathern 1992a). Strathern raises the question of whether the

reproduction model leads to the reproduction of relationships as she mentions that, unlike maternity, the father's role is always less visible and has to be symbolically or socially constructed (52), yet the very invisibility of parenthood is a social construction (55). She clarifies that while individuals reproduce individuals, "relations don't reproduce relations" (1992a: 53). In other words, relations must be constructed. Assisted reproductive technologies (ART) such as IUI (intrauterine insemination) and IVF (in-vitro fertilization) were initially developed to overcome infertility problems for heterosexual couples (Inhorn & Birenbaum-Carmeli 2008). Franklin (2013) offers a rich history and ethnographic research on new reproductive technologies especially IVF. According to Franklin, IVF discloses "our biological relativity in the form of a technology employed to create biological relatives, thus changing how we understand the adjective 'biological'" (2013:28). She points out that the pursuit of IVF as a popular conjugal technology is not necessarily driven by the desire to have children but is embodied in the sense of centring one's life around reproduction. In other words, it can be understood as a performance of the gender identities aligned within the institutional norms of both heterosexuality and marriage. The pursuit of IVF, argues Franklin, "involves the remaking of identities, relationships, social grouping, and kinship ties" (2013:220). IVF has become naturalised because it belongs to the techniques of normalisation (6). After IVF, in the context of NRT, "reproduction has become a matter of technique, and mere biology has become an oxymoron" (33).

If ART such as IVF has become normative, what is their position in queer families in China? How do non-heterosexual people understand the emerging assisted reproductive technologies (ART), and who tends to employ ART? Despite the presence of inequities and ethical dilemmas in using ART, LGBTQ people's inclusion in biological reproduction around the world represents hope for the potential of queer reproduction, family forms, and kinship (Mamo & Alston-Stepnitz 2015, Cadoret 2009, Inhorn & Birenbaum-Carmeli 2008, Mamo 2007). Since biology and nature are no longer self-evident notions and concepts of kinship and 'relatedness' are proliferating, new kinship studies have indeed shaped the discussion about family relations and intimacies today. Since the knowledge of kinship has been destabilised, we should be careful not to make presuppositions about what constitutes kinship or 'authentic' forms of kinship in society. In this thesis, I explore the practices of family, love, and parenthood without centring the conception of biological ties as the basis of kinship. I will argue that queer kinship in China is transforming and

elastic and should not be defined as imitative or alternative to blood ties.

Love, intimacy, and individuality

As kinship has been denaturalised and destabilised, intimacy and romantic love have become lynchpins in the study of personal relationships. ‘Intimate relations’ refers to social relationships that are “physically and/or emotionally close, personal, sexually intimate, private, caring, or loving” (Constable 2009:50). Yet, they are not limited to domestic space. Intimate relations often involve the practices of intimate labours that embody social orders and, at the same time, enable self-making (Parreñas 2017, Heberer 2017). Povinelli (2006) discusses the constitution of the discursive divide between the autological subject and genealogical society - which she calls imaginaries, involving discourses, practices, and fantasies. As Povinelli describes, “to assert a bond of love was to assert simultaneously a rejection of social utility” (2002:230). The ‘intimate event’, as she uses it, is the way in “which the event of normative love is formed at the intersection and crisis” of the autological subject and genealogical society. She points out the problem of viewing the intimate event as an actual event, for it is “not a thing but a moving target developed in European empire and used to secure power in contemporary world” (181).

Povinelli suggests that individuality and choice have become contested ideas, as individual freedom and social constraint are co-constituted. Weston (1991) points out that ‘choice’ is constituted as an individualistic and bourgeois notion (110). For Povinelli, the choice is perceived as if it is the “only real choice available to us” made between these discourses of individual freedom and social constraint in our everyday life (2006:6). Strathern (1992a) suggests that individualism should not be merely viewed as interfering with collective life and tradition; rather, convention is internalised as personal style by the exercise of choices. The very idea of individualism is a cultural practice produced in Western society. In other words, it would be fruitless to abstract individuality from convention as if they are both self-evident. In some situations, they could mean the same thing (Povinelli 2006). Therefore, I take the position that love and individuality are not universally actual truths but developing discourses. This research investigates queer couple’s practice of establishing *jiban* (mutual burden, mutuality), which encompasses love, intimacy, and discursive relations between individual choice and social constraint.

Queer kinship

Social changes worldwide have shaped the contemporary landscape of queer lives and love. The rapid development of ART, the emerging emphasis on intimate recognition and the increasing visibility of non-normative families has undoubtedly redefined and expanded the sphere of gender, sexualness, kinship, parenthood, and family. Possibilities of parenting are increasingly becoming imaginable for queer relationships. Non-heterosexual people are building families, though their choices are limited, and their situations vary. This subsection explores debates on 'fictive' kin and the relations between state law and queer kinship.

In contrast to biological kin, 'chosen/fictive' kin are often used by media to describe kin relations that are not based on biology. Public discourses on queer kinship have tended to define same-sex couples as 'pretended family relations' and 'so-called family', suggesting their 'fictive' and 'imitative' non-original status (Weston 1991). In this sense, queer intimacy is figured as against 'family', and queer love and queer parenthood are figured as against 'nature' (Folger 2008). Building on the literature on gay families, Povinelli (2002) has discussed the relations between the intimacy grid (love) and the genealogical grid (family). The saying that "love makes a family" in contemporary mainstream America emphasises the value of intimate recognition, while the genealogical imaginary hasn't died, nor has it been replaced by intimacy. Butler points out that homophobic arguments are "not only fuelled by homophobic sentiment but often focus on fears about reproductive relations" (2002:21). Butler makes the connection between state legislation and intimate relations and points out how delegitimization of sexual relations can "de-realize viable and significant sexual alliances" among people and cause self-doubt (25).

Weston clarifies that she treats gay kinship ideologies "as historical transformations rather than derivatives of other sorts of kinship relations" (1991:106). Drawing from in-depth interviews and experiences, Weston suggests that gay and lesbian families in the Bay area emphasise "choice and creativity" in opposition to "blood and biology". Here, 'choice' is understood as an individualistic notion that focuses on the 'I', and 'creativity' implies a utopian ideal that is usually presented as "I create my own tradition". For Weston, chosen families are neither substitutes for blood ties nor pretended family relations. At the same time, Weston does not exclude 'blood and biology' from queer kinship since chosen families are "defined through contrast with biological or blood family, making biology a

key feature of the opposing term that conditions the meaning of gay kinship” (211).

Anthropological studies on gay and lesbian parenthood are relatively marginal. Mizielińska and Stasińska’s research on families of choice in Poland emphasises the importance of considering geo-temporal conditions to avoid false universalism and binarism in the non-West (2017:16). Focusing on gay men with children in the United States, Goodfellow (2015) highlights the very uncertainty of gay fatherhood and queer kinship that lives with the ambiguity of state law and everyday heteronormative family norms. It should be noted that most of his informants are ‘out’ and active in gay communities. Sorainen (2015) investigates two queer women in a small Finnish city who show different attitudes toward queer marriage and motherhood rooted in their cultural memories. Significantly, Sorainen questions the queer imaginaries of metropolitan life and points out that, in the process of gentrification, urban centres are becoming more heteronormative and ‘family-oriented’ (2015:45). She thus suggests the queer life stories complicate the metropolitan/small city cultural binary. Likewise, Boyce and Dasgupta (2017) link queer future aspirations to modernity and suggest queer intimate lives embody complex ideals of utopia and futurity. Hence, I am interested in exploring the relation between queer cosmopolitan imaginaries and Chinese modernity through queer intimate and family lives.

The uncertainty between state legislation and queer kinship revealed in various studies (Borneman 1997, Goodfellow 2015) leads us to critically think about the relation between state and culture. In some contexts, the topic of queer parenting becomes the site for anxieties about cultural purity. Butler suggests that gay parenting is portrayed as challenging the fundamentals of a culture in the French debates on PACS (civil solidarity pact). Butler argues that although gay marriage is not the same as gay kinship, they are often conflated in the debates that are turned into the sites of displacement for other political fears about technology, unity of nation, and ultimately the openness of kinship (2002:21). Moreover, arguments against same-sex marriage and queer parenting reveal a discourse about what the state should do and what relationships should be recognised by the state. As Butler points out, state legitimization can be both the site for laying claim to recognisability and the site for articulating cultural fantasy that seeks to deny queer kinship (28).

In short, literature on queer kinship reveals complex links between ‘biological facts’, culture, and legal recognition. Critiques of romantic love and individuality further situate queer kinship as in tension between personal choices and social constraint. Since most of the concepts above originated from Euro-American scholarship, it is crucial to note the transnational turn in queer and kinship theories. Rather than asking whether these theories are applicable in the Chinese context, this research aims to track these conceptions with geo-temporal attentiveness. To further delineate the objectives of this research, I will turn to review the existing literature on Chinese kinship and Chinese non-heterosexual people.

Chinese kinship

In this section, I review the literature on representations and practices of family, marriage, love, and broader relationships in China. Chinese kinship values are rooted in the traditions of patrilineal continuity and Confucian philosophy (e.g., Yang 1957, Walker 1996). Traditional Chinese families consist of a line of male ancestors and descendants, while daughters and wives are not considered insiders. The ritual practice of ancestor worship and filial piety emphasise the continuation of patrilineal lineage rather than intimate relationships when it comes to marriage. The practice of concubines in late Imperial China suggests complexity in Chinese kinship, as concubines were neither recognised as the wife in the house nor the legal mother of their biological children. Concubines’ biological children could only call the legal wife ‘mother’ and were raised by the wife; concubines could not address their children by their name, but only with appropriate titles. Walker (1996) thus suggests concubines failed to form bonds of kinship in the way that legal marriage could. In other words, parenthood could not be created through the alleged romance or the biological fact of procreation.

It should be noted that, until the 1970s, few Western social scientists were granted permission to enter mainland China to conduct ethnographic research. Many Western scholars have conducted fieldwork in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other overseas Chinese communities which reveal distinct regional characteristics. Stafford suggests that the classical accounts of Chinese kinship place emphasis on regional and historical analysis which has tended to devalue the role of participant observation (2000:49). Watson (1982) has suggested a reconsideration of the ‘closeness’ of Chinese kinship groups. Above all, the fluid nature of Chinese kinship (Stafford 2000, Yan 2001, Brandtstädter & Santos 2008) must be acknowledged, especially in the time of rapid social change.

Scholars agree that the concept and forms of family and marriage have changed enormously under social changes in rural and urban China (Pimentel 2000, Yan 2003, Cohen 2005, Li 2011, Tang & Chen 2012, Xie 2013). Clearly, love and freedom have become increasingly important to marriage. Nevertheless, the conceptions of love and free choice in contemporary China may differ from the Western version. As Pimentel (2000) mentions, what Chinese couples have said about 'love' can be viewed as 'unromantic' in Westerners' eyes and is more similar to the Western conception of 'companionship' (2000:44). Jankowiak and Li (2017) also point out that the one-child generation marries for various reasons. The notion of 'romantic love' in China is constituted through the rejection of arranged marriage and is linked to the sense of modernity (Yan 2003, Pan 2015). Since the 1920s, the May Fourth progressives have promoted 'romantic/free love' as a symbol of freedom, autonomy, and equality against Confucian values (Lee 2006). Pan (2015) and Lee (2006) explore 'love' in a historical and literary context. Arranged marriage, once a social norm, has become a symbol of backwardness. The emerging discourses on 'romantic love', 'true love', and 'free love' in 20th century China symbolise the tensions between tradition and modernity. Whilst these works provide nuanced genealogical analysis, ethnographic research in this area remains marginal. Recent studies have demonstrated continuing sturdy inter-generational bonds in urban China (Xu & Xia 2014). From this perspective, investigating the link between romantic love and filial piety in contemporary China is crucial for understanding the transformations in kinship.

To summarise, both the quantitative and qualitative data I have discussed suggests that the weakening parental authority and the increasing pursuit of individual autonomy do not necessarily relate to the decrease in parental involvement and parent-child ties. Again, research findings situate contemporary Chinese marriage and family values in tensions between the traditional and the modern, Western/global and Oriental/local. Drawing from manifold inconsistencies, researchers thus argue that Chinese marriages and families still hold some distinctive characteristics that are different from the Western pattern, and the Chinese kinship experience has remained recognisably 'similar to itself' despite ongoing social transformations (Pimentel 2000, see also Riley 1994, Brandtstädter & Santos 2008, Yeung & Hu 2016).

The fact that national quantitative research has tended to reduce family and kinship to blood ties (sometimes excluding marital relations) seems to highlight the very primacy of parent-child relations and the privileged position of blood ties. With the turn of new kinship studies in recent years, anthropologists have studied broader forms of relationships in China. For example, Stafford (2000) argues that the cycles of *Yang* (parent-child relationships) and *Laiwang* (relationships between friends, neighbours, and acquaintances) are equally important. Looking into children raised by grandparents in urban cities, Jankowiak (2008) emphasises the emotional bonds in families.

The current discussion about romantic love and Chinese kinship identifies selfhood as a contested imaginary. The Chinese ‘self’ today can be “divided by a number of ‘dividers,’ such as past versus present, public versus private, moral versus immoral, and so on” (Kleinman et al. 2011:5). The divided selfhood of being a Chinese individual who is encouraged to pursue freedom, desires and self-interests yet also accept that part of their identity is defined by “their loyalty to the party and the state” (Kleinman et al. 2011:9) has situated Chinese, particularly non-heterosexual people, on the edge of conflicting ethical values and practices. Yan (2017) has furthered the discussion on this divided selfhood and suggests a tripartite approach to understanding Chinese personhood. He argues that, in the process of ‘doing personhood’ (*zuoren*), the moralist self is employed to control the desiring individual for the purpose of making oneself the proper relational person (3). Kleinman and Yan’s arguments regarding Chinese personhood take us back to the discussion of sexuality and sexualness, as they powerfully stress the manifold and dynamic process of constructing one’s sense of ‘self’. This research adopts this fruitful approach to explore Chinese non-heterosexual subjects’ personal desires, social relations, and inner struggles as all indispensable features of the self.

An intriguing issue here is the connection between the moral landscape in Chinese society and the individual practices of non-heterosexual people. Building on Yan’s argument that personhood is a process of becoming, I am interested in how the complexity of personhood is associated with the emerging and morally controversial lifestyles and practices in queer life-worlds¹⁶. As an individual in contemporary China, how do Chinese non-heterosexual people morally evaluate their social actions such as ‘performing’

¹⁶ Though filial piety and the notion of ‘being a good son/daughter’ is often mentioned in literature as an ethical obligation, I intend to relate the notion of morality to broader dimensions within society.

xinghun (contract marriage) and establishing queer families? This question further relates to their quest for meaning and future aspirations embodied in every aspect of their social life.

Scholars have identified manifold paradoxes in contemporary Chinese intimate and familial life. Emerging anthropological studies provide a meaningful way to understand the transformations and variations in the making of Chinese kinship, for transformation should be theorised as central to human kinship (Brandtstädter & Santos 2008:2). The main areas of kinship studies in China have focused on heterosexual relationships and natal families. Against this backdrop, this thesis explores the dynamic understandings and practices of love, care, selfhood, parenthood, and sociality in queer lives and hence transformations in Chinese kinship more generally.

Chinese non-normative sexual identities and relationships

I now turn to review the existing literature on contemporary Chinese queer identities and relationships. Sang (2003) traces the emergence of female homosexual literary writings in the public sphere from pre-modern to contemporary China. Wei Wei (2007) provides us with vivid ethnographic research into the formation and transformation of local homosexual identities in Chengdu. His argument that the tropes of ‘coming out’ and ‘the closet’ are problematic in the Chinese context resonates with Kam’s study on queer women (*lala*) in Shanghai. Ho (2010) studies same-sex communities during the opening up of China and suggests the public discourse of gay and lesbian identities in China is linked to the history of colonialism and modernity. As Sang suggests, modern lesbian identities in China are not merely a Western import or a local representation; the production of these identities is multi-faceted. Rofel (2007) links the production of desires in China to neoliberalism and transnational queer studies. She deliberately problematises the homogenising concept of the global gay identity, asking “what kinds of investments lead to the assumption that such a subjectivity - a global gay identity - exists?” (88). Rather, Rofel argues that the emergence of Chinese gay identities is related to the desires for cultural citizenship, a “novel process of subjectification and new modes of inclusion and exclusion” (95). Following this idea, Kong (2010) discusses the making of sexual citizenship among Chinese gay men in Hong Kong, London, and mainland China, which provides insights into Chinese masculinities and sexual citizenships. For Kong, being gay in mainland China “has slowly shifted from the medical and deviant discourse of

homosexuality” to a new type of cultural and urban citizenship emphasising “quality (*suzhi*), individuality, difference and modernity” (12).

Rofel (2007) and Kong (2010) build on the notions of neoliberalism, individualism, and modernity in China in relation to Chinese gay and lesbian cultural citizenship. Bao (2018) traces the construction of *tongzhi* identity during and after the Mao era and uses this particular term as an angle to articulate Chinese queer experience. For Bao, *tongzhi* subjectivity and queer politics in contemporary China are both produced by and, at the same time, resist the state and capitalism. In this sense, *tongzhi* and queer are not merely indigenous or global, socialist, or neoliberal conceptions. John Wei (2020) points out that queer NGOs and film clubs encourage their participants to live an honest and ethical lifestyle which again enforces the notion of being a good sexual citizen in contemporary China. Rofel, Kong, Bao, and Wei trace the making and self-making of gay and lesbian subjectivities in China as a transcultural process rather than emphasising East-West differences. It is worth noting that neither the English terms nor the local terms are seamlessly fixed. Even the concept of being Chinese no longer involves commonly accepted cultural standards (Cohen 2005:59). I understand the terms ‘Chineseness’, ‘traditional’, ‘patriarchy’, and ‘modernity’ as dynamic discourses.

Ethnographic studies on contemporary Chinese same-sex relationships have focused on their subject positions and negotiations with normative cultural norms. Kam (2013) has explored *lala* (queer women) in the public discourse, the marriage pressures they face, and their coming-out experience in Shanghai. Engebretsen (2008, 2009 & 2014) has studied *lalas*’ developing subjectivities, everyday practices and strategies in Beijing with a nuanced analysis of their sense of national belonging and the desire to be ‘normal’. Normative kinship, which usually means living a ‘stable’ (*wending*) and ‘harmony’ (*hexie*) life within society, is tied to heterosexual marriage and expressed through the language of belonging and cultural citizenship. Engebretsen links the concept of ‘chosen kin’ to the Chinese filial system by describing the *lala* couple who take daughters’ role to normalise into their lovers’ family. Engebretsen also examines the gay-lesbian contract marriage (*xinghun*) in relation to patriarchal orders in Chinese society. Zheng (2015) offers an ethnographic analysis of male same-sex relations and the intersectionality of sexuality and social class based on her fieldwork in Dalian. Wei (2020) develops a paradigm of stretched kinship among Chinese queer people, who try not to break from their family but

attempt to keep their relationship with their families of origin elastic and resilient in their home-leaving and reunion process.

Overall, most ethnographic works on Chinese non-heterosexual people strive to delineate the dynamic image of non-normative sexualities under the rapid social transformation from state socialism to post-reform China. Since most works focus solely on either queer men or women, the effect of gender norms is well analysed. The marriage pressure is emphasised as a social norm; yet, marriage and heteronormativity are often left unelaborated and conflated with ‘traditional’ Chinese kinship as if they are fixed notions. Furthermore, kinship terms are, in many cases, used as ahistorical in Chinese culture, while the idea of marriage as well as family in China has changed dramatically. Families of origin are often analysed as a central heteronormative family unit. In this sense, blood ties are naturalised as taken-for-granted categories, whereas anthropologists argue that the nature of Chinese kinship is fluid and malleable (Stafford 2000, Brandtstädter & Santos 2008). Moreover, conceptualising the heteronormative family unit as a universal category can be invalid in many cultural contexts where there are other significant factors such as social class, location, and state intervention. The social policy explanation for family pressure shouldn’t be overlooked (Hildebrandt 2018). Not all anti-heteronormative sexual relationships are anti-family, and the notion of family is constantly being reconstructed (Bose & Bhattacharyya 2007: xxvi).

Above all, we must find out what conjugal relations mean in the shifting Chinese context before discussing what marriage and family mean to non-heterosexual people in contemporary China. Then, we may ask: How is individual choice understood and practiced in China? How are families of origin understood– in relation to other kinds of relatedness –in China? How does the law work with intimate relationships? How does social practice intersect with moral landscapes in China? The incongruity between studies on Chinese non-heterosexual people and on Chinese kinship suggests that scholars studying Chinese non-heterosexual people are certainly keeping pace with the transnational turn to ‘new queer studies’, whilst they might overlook the turn to ‘new kinship studies’, as well as the debate on morality and transnational finance. It is critical not to make presumptions about what constitutes kinship in China. Furthermore, kinship is not reducible to ‘family’ (Butler 2002).

A major challenge for most researchers is access to ethnographic sites. In many cases, the definition of ‘queer space and community’ is narrowed to public areas (bars, parks) and local non-profit organisations. Therefore, queer sociality and collective identity are often equated with queer activism. Such limitability is partly due to the researcher’s foreign status or the timeframe of the fieldwork. Online communities and causal social gatherings remain rather untouched areas in ethnographic research. But can the causal offline socialising - a dinner in a restaurant with several queer friends from the same online chat group - be denied as a form of community-building? The complex dimensions of queer sociality and collective community cannot be skimmed. Furthermore, social researchers generally use traditional mass media (TV, magazine) as the major recourse for examining the public discourse of homosexuality, whereas the rapid growth of new media builds up diverse dimensions of ‘public’ that need to be taken into account. Therefore, this ethnography explores the multiple dimensions of discourses of queer practices in China.

It should also be noted that most of the ethnographic works mentioned above have neither been published in mainland China nor translated into Chinese, thus creating an academic gap between domestic Chinese and Euro-American academia. Other than that, gender and queer studies generally come from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities (e.g., Chou 1997, Kong 2011, Tang 2011) with distinct regional and historical contexts. Locally, most research on Chinese non-normative sexualities has come from bio-medicine and healthcare subjects; a few come from literature, sociology, law, and media studies, none from anthropology¹⁷. Domestic research is mainly based on quantitative methods with a sole focus on male homosexuality (e.g., Jing, Sun & Zhou 2012). In recent years, both the private sectors (*BuleD*, *Lesdo*) and non-profit organisations (Beijing LGBT Center) in mainland China have conducted relevant research based on quantitative surveys. Yet, the results need to be carefully scrutinised since they often depend on one’s self-representation and self-identification.

Additionally, regional variation is rarely mentioned, despite the fact that living in Southeast Coast China can be dramatically different from living in Northwest China in many ways. Using a solely urban/rural divide to understand the regional context is inconclusive. The remarkable internal differences within China cannot be overlooked, as

¹⁷ According to the search result in CNKI.net (the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure) in 2017.

Beijing, Shanghai, Dalian, and Shenzhen all have their distinctive regional history and culture that shape the local queer community and public attitude toward homosexuality (Wei 2014).

Despite the emergence of research on Chinese non-heterosexual people, the ethnographic data remain sparse, and many areas in queer everyday life remain unreached. The diverse modalities of non-heterosexual families and their practice of establishing enduring relationships and parenting has not been ethnographically researched. By locating my research in the landscape of queer relationships in urban China, I explore broadened forms of relatedness without making presuppositions about what constitutes a family and without relying on specific distinctions between social ties and biological ties, tradition and modernity.

Outline of the Chapters

The main body of this thesis consists of five intersecting chapters. The following chapter on methodology explains the rationale of research design and traces the progress throughout my yearlong ethnographic fieldwork in Shenzhen and other urban areas in Guangdong, China. I chose participant observation and semi-structured interviews as my main research methods to depict the everyday practice of queer relationships. Research data was also collected from legal documents, mass media, and online discussion on various social media platforms to locate my observation within the wider social and political context. I also discuss how my biography connected with my multiple roles and queer reflectivity in my home-field.

In Chapter 3, I discuss queer intimate relationships within the shifting landscapes of role terms, love, trust, modernity, and heteronormativity. I explore non-heterosexual people's changing attitudes towards different modes of same-sex relationships, as the once seemingly-gendered relationship modes have become elastic. As the two of the most prominent economic hubs and migrant-attracting cities, Shenzhen and Guangzhou are relevant scenes to discuss ideas around career opportunities and urban utopia. Lastly in this chapter, I explore queer couples' existing strategies to sustain their romantic cohabitating relationships, as their understanding of intimate love relates to economic capital and legal context.

Chapter 4 deals with the desire to reproduce in relation to the concept of blood ties in Chinese queer life-worlds. I explore when and why non-heterosexual people of different age groups and backgrounds want to have children or remain childless in urban China. Following this, I document the existing practices for Chinese non-heterosexual individuals and couples around having children and the moral and legal implications raised by them. Queer parents frequently have children through their previous *zhihun* /heterosexual marriages, cooperative *xinghun* marriages, *guoji* adoptions (mostly from relatives), or the employment of assisted reproductive technologies (ART). I also discuss the tendency in online and offline queer communities to evaluate non-heterosexual people's pathways to parenthood through a dichotomous moral-immoral discourse.

Chapter 5 turns the focus to the interplay of queer social networks and the emerging ART companies in urban China. I explore how ART has emerged as an ideal way for queer subjects to have children. As data collected from legal documents, online discussions, and my field observation indicate, the legal and moral debates brought by queer parents' participation in assisted reproduction are perceived dramatically differently among diverse gender and sexual groups in Chinese society. This chapter illustrates ethnographically how the ART companies and queer organisations sponsored by them come together to shape the notions of reproduction and future in queer life-worlds.

In Chapter 6, I delineate how my research participants use their understanding and language of blood ties and queer kinship to distinguish between 'my own children', 'my partner's children', 'our children', and how they integrate such distinctions into their social worlds. I reveal the complexity of defining the boundaries between blood kin and queer kin. The cases of single queer parents and queer couples having children together amplify their understanding of blood ties and children's symbolic position in forming a stable relationship and a reproductive future. Also, I explore how demonstrations of parental love for their children closely links to their socio-economic capabilities.

Developed from previous ethnographic chapters, Chapter 7 focuses on the changing understanding of family in urban China in the context of social changes and how these interact with queer relationships. I investigate the concept of '*jia* (family/home)' for Chinese non-heterosexual people through its cultural meanings and socio-legal meanings. This chapter unfolds the various modalities of the non-heterosexual family in China.

Moreover, I explore how these forms of queer relationality are made visible or hidden in different times and spaces and therefore complicate the assimilative-radical, visible-invisible, public-private dualities in queer everyday life.

Throughout this thesis, the two major types of moral discourse playing out in Chinese queer daily life cannot be discounted. The first discourse is arguably constructed by state policies and Confucian familism and is often referred to as the ‘traditional’ ideology. It suggests that one has no choice but to fulfil family duties through entering into a heterosexual marriage, having biological offspring, and cultivating harmonious relationships with family elders. The second discourse is arguably constructed by Chinese LGBT/*tongzhi* organisations and Western-originated coming-out politics and is often regarded as the ‘modern’ ideology. It asks that one firmly embrace an out and progressive lifestyle while being a responsible and good citizen. These two discourses seem to be in radical conflict with each other at first glance; however, the ethnographic chapters combinedly demonstrate how Chinese citizen-subjects in queer relationships seek to navigate these actually compatible moral dilemmas and ultimately unsettle the heteronormative Chinese kinship system.

Chapter 2 Methodology

In this chapter, I explain the rationale behind the research design and trace my fieldwork progression. I conducted one-year ethnographic research mainly in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China, from June 2018 to July 2019. This research also benefited from a series of monthlong follow-up field visits in 2020. Doing ethnographic fieldwork allows me to depict the ongoing transformations in queer relationships. I will detail the methodological challenges I faced and the strategies I employed at each phase of my research. I also discuss how my biography connected with my multiple roles and queer reflexivity in the field.

In addition to the major field site, Shenzhen, I travelled to Guangzhou and Dongguan multiple times to carry out interviews and participant observations with queer individuals, families, and organisations. I also used online platforms to connect with my research participants before, during, and after my Shenzhen fieldwork. I chose Shenzhen as my main field site not only because of its absence from Chinese queer studies but also because of the impressive migrant environment for non-heterosexual people that links to my consideration of queer utopias and personal choices. Within an hour's train trip from Shenzhen, Guangzhou is the capital city of Guangdong Province, also attracting thousands of migrants each year. Both Shenzhen and Guangzhou belong to the Pearl River Delta Metropolitan Region, the largest economic hub in China.

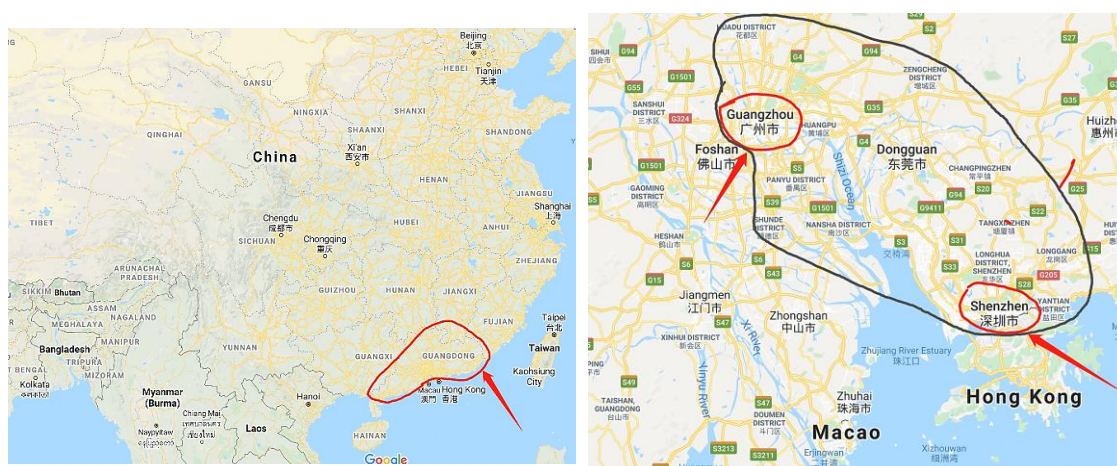


Fig. 1 Guangdong Province (left); Shenzhen and Guangzhou (right); from Google Maps

As explained in the introduction, the main research questions are: how is queer kinship

recognised and practiced in Chinese society in relations to social policies, cultural conventions, and modernisation processes? How do Chinese non-heterosexual people deal with the conflicting moral expectations from themselves, queer lovers, families of origin, and the nation-state? How do Chinese non-heterosexual subjects imagine their future? Here I identify my thesis's key themes as queer intimate love, queer *xinghun* marriage and parenting, queer family, and queer futurity.

To answer the research questions, I chose participant observation and semi-structured interviews as my major research methods, which will be detailed in the following subsections. For numerous social researchers, participant observation represents the heart of anthropology and the defining tool for ethnographic fieldwork (Spradley 1980, Schensul et al. 1999, Boellstorff 2007a, DeWalt & DeWalt 2010). This open-ended, reciprocal, and reflective method is the core of my research, as my goal is to explore my participants' everyday practices and their knowledge-worlds in a coherent context rather than conducting selective learning. In other words, conducting participant observation enables me to foster conceptual exchange with individuals and to obtain their description of the things happening in their world, their explanation of how they know what they know, their conceptual points of references, and their key theories (Franklin 2019). As Malinowski points out, the ethnographer must study what concerns the research participant most intimately, that is, the hold which life has on them (1984 [2006]: 56). In this research, the interview is seen "as a part of participant observation and not apart from participant observation" (Skinner 2012: 35). The flexibility of the semi-structured interview allowed me to stay open to new themes without losing the key research questions. The purpose of conducting interviews was not only to collect informants' views of their lived worlds but also to reflect on their engaged interaction with them (Hockey & Forsey 2012). Research data was also collected from legal documents, mass media, and online discussion on various social media platforms to help me locate my observations within the wider social and political context. My life experience as a Chinese and queer woman also complements this research.

Locating Participants

In correspondence with the focus on queer kinship practices, I came to Shenzhen to look for same-sex couples, gay and lesbian people in *xinghun* marriages and non-heterosexual parents as the three major groups of participants. There were participants who met more

than one criterion, for example, a respondent who was co-parenting with an opposite-sex *xinghun* partner (in a *xinghun* marriage) and dating a same-sex lover simultaneously.

It should be made clear that firm self-identification with LGBT(QIA) terminology was not the key factor for me in locating participants; rather, I let participants freely use any term to express their sense of their own sexual desires and gender or not use any term at all. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, my research participants have used various terms such as gay, bisexual, les, *lala*, *tongzhi*, and sometimes *zhiren* (straight person) to describe themselves or their same-sex partners. These terms were often used interchangeably with vague meanings. Some participants have experienced changes in gender or sexual identity during their lifetime. For example, one respondent, Feng, told me that when he learned the definition of ‘transgender’ at an LGBT salon, he realised that he fit into the category of a transgender man after presenting himself as a *ye* (manly) T for 30 years. Feng explained that he never felt comfortable with his female body, and he desired to be seen as a man. In the meantime, he didn’t completely stop using *ye* T to describe himself and still blended in well in lesbian social circles. According to Feng, this change didn’t have any effect on his life, including his work and romantic relationship. His peers and his girlfriend, who had lived with him for twelve years, had always called him ‘Uncle Feng (*Feng shu*)’, and that wouldn’t change no matter what his gender and sexual identity were. His girlfriend, who used to think herself as totally straight, started to introduce herself to others as bisexual/*ku’er* (queer) after falling in love with him. Feng and his girlfriend’s account was just one example where the boundary sense of gender and sexual identification was deconstructed. In short, it is not helpful to ascribe the diverse forms of genders and sexualness to ‘types of person’ since sexual desire doesn’t always inform interiority or the ‘truth’ about someone (Khanna 2017). The individual, relational, and social articulation of selfhood in Chinese and other non-Euro-American contexts need to be taken into account when it comes to understanding sexual experiences and subjectivities (ibid, see also Yan 2017).

Taking such fluidity and intangibility into account, I didn’t intend to impose ‘queer’ as a universal identity category with clear boundaries but, rather, to use it strategically as an umbrella term which covers relationships and life choices that fall out of the frame of existing heteronormative codes in China. Instead of viewing ‘queer’ as a noun for a certain type of human subjects, I employ ‘non-heterosexual people’ as a loose term to

refer to my friend-respondents. In most cases, I address individual friend-respondents with the term of their choice. In this way, I don't intend to disavow sexual categories, but rather to revalue the prevalence of sexuality-as-personhood in queer ethnographic studies. Also, my research includes a diverse group of non-heterosexual parents, including but not limited to same-sex couples who use assisted reproductive technologies (ART) to have children, gay-lesbian *xinghun* co-parents, and single and divorced queer parents.

It is worth pointing out that I didn't use Chinese LGBT organisations as the entry point for my field research since I was aware of the visible disparity between queer activists' social networks and non-heterosexual people's everyday 'ordinary' social circles in mainland China. For example, few of my friend-informants showed interest in the annual LGBT pride parade in Hong Kong despite Shenzhen being less than an hour from Hong Kong. Queer couples and parents I have met often claimed that they were 'ordinary people (*putong ren*)', and therefore their life experience would be boring for a researcher to study. When I talked to queer individuals who actively participated in queer public events and those who did not, I often noticed antagonistic sentiments as if the two groups viewed themselves as coming from very different worlds. One often felt that a discussion of LGBT rights (and civil rights in general) was unwelcome in an online same-sex chat group because such topics were considered too 'serious' and 'radical'. On the other hand, many queer activists and volunteers despised the practice of *xinghun* marriage and blamed non-heterosexual people who entered heterosexual marriages as damaging the overall moral image of Chinese sexual minorities. Although this research benefited from my attendance at LGBT events and my connection with employees and volunteers in LGBT organisations, the everyday kinship practice which formed the major part of my observation was rarely considered activism-related; neither were my friend-informants' practices always encouraged in queer activist communities. In other words, if I limited my participants to people who engaged with queer movements, I wouldn't be able to realise the other parts of queer life-worlds that were not immediately interesting to researchers.

At the beginning of the fieldwork, I posted a recruitment article on my WeChat¹⁸ public account. In the article, I explained the aim and methods of my research. I also introduced myself as a queer woman who aimed to make positive changes for Chinese gender and sexual minorities. I made it clear that I would appreciate any form of contact. My friends and peers, including those who identify as straight, forwarded this article to their friends and chat groups. Eventually, this article was read by hundreds of people. More than 60 people reached me in the next few months and showed their interest in helping with my research. I talked to each of them online and learned they were mostly aged 18 to 28; many of them were studying in top universities, and some of them were in international high schools. They were all willing to tell me about their personal life histories and to meet in person. At the same time, I have been meeting regularly with my queer friends in Shenzhen and discussing my research with them. Although many of them joked that they were single and childless and not qualified to participate in my research, they introduced me to their friends. Thanks to my friends' referrals, I have had little problem with gaining trust and building rapport with respondents whom I came to know in this way.

On the other hand, no queer parents proactively reached out to me. Although I had been actively socialising with queer women both online and offline in Shenzhen for years, I know few who had children when I started this research. One reason for this is that most of my queer friends are in their 20s and had not started to think about having children; to find queer parents, I had to reach out to non-heterosexual people older than me. Moreover, most queer parents in China were widely believed to live in relatively invisible status and were cautious about revealing their private life to unrelated others. Almost all online queer parents chat groups are exclusively for non-heterosexual people who are in the process of having children or those with children, and the group chat administrators would verify each member's parental status before letting them in. I used a variety of strategies to expand my connections to different queer communities. For instance, I attended ten LGBT social events to learn about queer parents and IVF/surrogacy companies. I paid more attention to the attendees and volunteers rather than event organisers. Besides, Chinese mainstream social media platforms and same-sex dating Apps including Sina

¹⁸ WeChat, also known as *Weixin*, is a Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media and mobile payment application owned by Tencent. WeChat Public Account is a marketing platform that can act as a complete brand hub, a news portal, or a blog page. I created a WeChat Public account before this research and had been using it as a blog page.

Weibo, *Douban*, *Lesdo*, *Rela*, and *BlueD*¹⁹ were used to find queer parents and relevant social circles. The pattern was repeated during the fieldwork: firstly, I joined a WeChat group and attended their group dinner or night out; then, I introduced my research project and asked for their consent to participate in my research individually. During the first three months, I reached several micro-celebrity gay fathers and lesbian mothers who had been actively sharing their personal lives with followers on social media. Through their queer networks, I got to know more queer parents who were not ‘out in public’. Many respondents over the age of 30 treated me like a junior whom they could give life advice to. Most people became warmer with me after knowing that anthropology is not journalism, and I was not writing headline stories using their actual names. Through repetitions of this pattern, I have found myself entering diverse queer social circles and meeting new friends-respondents from diverse backgrounds and age groups that I would never have met if I did not do this research. By the end of fieldwork, the number of non-heterosexual people in my WeChat contact list expanded to 250, aged from 18 to 50 years old.

The major group of my research participants is non-heterosexual individuals who have migrated to Shenzhen and Guangzhou, the two major cities in Guangdong Province, from other parts of mainland China. The fact that they left their hometown is a crucial social variable. Their experience migrating to a big city indeed interacted with their intimate and familial experiences. Many middle-aged participants in this research had achieved a higher social position and settled in Shenzhen or Guangzhou. Drawing from the study on queer parents from middle-class and working-class backgrounds, Taylor (2010) reminds us of the persistent methodological challenge regarding the interconnection between sexuality and class when researching queer subjects. As mentioned above, neither the most transgressive queer activist networks nor the everyday ‘ordinary’ in China should be described as representative Chinese LGBT experience. The social geography of research participants, as Engebretsen mentioned in her study of queer women in Beijing, shows us that to understand ethnographically queer culture “requires a willingness to de-naturalize the primacy of sexuality as a basis of individual identity - both desired and practiced versions” (2008:89). Queer lives are not only sexualised and gendered but also classed; thus, we must not take queer subjects’ social privileges or disadvantages for

¹⁹ Sina *Weibo* and *Douban* are general social media platforms; *Lesdo*, *Rela*, and *BlueD* are same-sex dating Apps.

granted. In my master's fieldwork in Chengdu, China, I noticed that gender and age were critical social variables in the study of queer lives as they were tied with one's social status. Likewise, my friend-respondents' educational levels and social classes will also be acknowledged in this thesis. It is important to avoid seeing research participants as belonging to a static social category.

Overall, my queer network, which I have had for years, and the various social media platforms, have been my major resources for finding research participants. In most circumstances, my role as a queer researcher was firstly acknowledged by potential participants, which smoothed the progress of introducing my research and asking for consent. The multi-layered interplay of social status, gender norms and sexualness are taken into consideration, as my friend-respondents' experience of queer relationships intersects with their experience of being in diverse dynamic social groups.

Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

I conducted around thirty semi-structured in-depth interviews with friend-respondents. I interviewed most of them on a one-to-one basis, and a few queer couples chose to do the interview together. Interviews took place in cafes, restaurants, participants' offices, and private apartments at their convenience. Many respondents initially chose to be interviewed in a café in their neighbourhood. I used set questions to ask for potentially sensitive information such as career path, future financial plans, and family background as it was less suspicious when I brought these topics out for research/impersonal purposes. All interviews lasted for more than three hours as all respondents came prepared to tell their life stories. I usually let the conversation unfold as open-ended as possible. The flexible approach prioritised interviewees' interests and allowed me to notice emerging issues raised by them. People treated my research in different ways, and their motivations for participating varied. Some respondents working in the IVF/surrogacy industry invited me to their offices and, at least in my perception, our interviews were shaped by their desire to improve their moral image. Three respondents encouraged me to use a voice recorder, and one of them hired two cameramen and recorded the whole interview to put on his online portfolio. Other interviewees who hadn't revealed their queer relationships to parents and colleagues made me promise that their real names would not appear on any public platform.

I didn't use an audio recorder for most interviews and only had a notebook to write down shorthand notes. Since the interviews were conducted in Mandarin, I wrote down respondents' exact words in Chinese and translated them into English afterwards. For each interview, I wrote a diary as soon as I went back home to reflect on the discussion. I sought to not only gather detailed lived experiences but also to explore the interactions, especially when interview topics became potentially challenging. For instance, how did they choose to present their intimate and familial life to a researcher, and what kind of topics remained unspoken? It became crucial to recognise the topics they liked to talk about and the topics they avoided in different circumstances and with different people. The interview has become a "rehearsal of processes of covering and uncovering" and the work for the researcher has only just begun at the end of interview (Strathern 2012:266).

Moreover, recording respondents' narratives of their life histories was not only an essential part of this research but also represented a breakthrough in fostering closeness between myself and the respondents. These in-depth interviews often worked unexpectedly as an entry point for a growing friendship. During each interview, I exchanged a great amount of my life history with respondents, which allowed us to develop a rapport in a profoundly short period. There were moments when we found we shared similar struggles and exchanged useful information on various topics. Some respondents joked, "now you know more about me than my family/friends!" and I often replied, "you too," with laughter. I was not a mere listener. Since many of them are older than me, they often treated me to a drink or a meal after the interview. This gave me an excuse to ask them out the next time to return the hospitality. More than half of them remained in touch with me, and we had follow-up casual meetings that allowed me to learn more details about their lives. By this means, they gradually became my long-term friend-respondents rather than interviewees. Two respondents agreed to do only a one-off interview, while we had each other's social media accounts and occasionally had small talks online. In other words, I did not stop gathering data from a respondent right after an interview was completed; rather, the interview was a part of an ongoing participant observation for me, which continued to yield ethnographic knowledge. For instance, I have heard one of my friend-respondents Tian talking about his son on multiple occasions, including our first interview, an LGBT event, and casual get-togethers with his gay friends. On each occasion, Tian presented his familial life differently. The data I gathered

in semi-structured interviews are therefore not set apart from data collected from other approaches.

Participant Observation

In the last week of my fieldwork, my girlfriend Jin, myself, and two other *lala* women were invited to Joey's flat for dinner and a get-together. The five of us brought some snacks and drinks. Just turned 30, Joey was in a *xinghun* marriage with a gay man, and she had just started a committed relationship with a T-identified lesbian. Joey and the other two friends learned and agreed to participate in my research since our first group meetup. Just like my many other friends, Joey asked: "When will you be back in China? We will miss you terribly." After I said that I was going back to China in a few months for the winter vacation, Joey seemed relieved and reminded me to message her when I got back to China. During dinner, we gossiped about her new girlfriend and our mutual friends. Our conversation was like any conversation normally occurring among friends, and I found no real boundary between social life and research.

Friendship and fieldwork are similar in many ways as we gain entry, negotiate our roles and behaviours, participate, observe our involvement, and build reciprocal bonds in the world with others (Tillmann-Healy 2003:732). I had been making queer friends long before I decided to do doctoral research, while my knowledge and experience with my regular friend-making routine became multifaceted since I started this research. To adopt friendship as method means that we research with ethics of friendship (ibid). As a friend, I shared trust, mutuality, respect, empathy, and support with my friend-respondents. As a fieldworker, I aimed to observe our everyday interaction with an analytical lens and reflective knowledge.

During fieldwork, I participated in a wide range of formal and casual activities, including LGBT talkfests, group dinners, get-togethers, and karaoke nights. The key LGBT organisation I focused on was PFLAG China. PFLAG China was founded in 2008 in Guangzhou, China and was named after the American organisation called PFLAG. The name PFLAG stands for Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Their talkfests and salons were often followed by big group dinners in nearby restaurants. In addition, I paid regular visits to assisted reproductive technologies (ART) companies and had casual chats with employees during their free time. Eventually, not only queer

employees but also the heterosexual-identified employees became acquainted with me. I joined numerous online LGBT chat groups and attended their offline meetups. As a result, I was seeing new faces at an intensive pace.

The focus of my research is everyday practice; therefore, it is important to build lasting relationships with my informants and actively be a participant in their daily activities. Specifically, the goal was to observe the ways they address their relatives, reflect on past events, employ kin terms, express affection and care for others, how they choose to have children (or not), make living arrangements with their families of origin and chosen ties, socialise with queer friends, celebrate holidays and festivals, invest in their future life, and negotiate their practices with moral values and state law. To address my research goals and questions, I made weekly plans to spend time with friend-respondents closely by asking if they were interested in any leisure activities in their free time. Sometimes, it was the other way around when they asked me to join them or help them with their minor tasks. I made myself very flexible during my time in Shenzhen, so many friend-respondents were aware that I could show up and join them anytime. Having such time flexibility was indeed impressive to others in a booming city, where people are often too busy to make time for others. I accompanied them to their offices and shops, went shopping with them and played with their kids. Moreover, regular online chats with key friend-informants were made via WeChat as we gossiped and exchanged complaints about ex-lovers, relatives, and house prices.

Before starting my fieldwork, I never thought that being in a relationship was going to be my entry ticket in numerous circumstances. The fact that I was not single implies a safe signal that I wouldn't go beyond the friend zone, becoming a potential threat to couples. I wouldn't be able to ask many of my female informants out individually without mentioning my girlfriend. One of my respondent's girlfriends was suspicious about my motivations until she saw Jin in person. It also occurred to me that since I "look like a *zhinv* (straight woman)" to some respondents, Jin's presence somehow assured my queerness to them. Furthermore, in most LGBT group meetups, people generally showed much more interest in my story with Jin than my research topic. I had to answer questions about our relationship with parents and our future repeatedly and became prepared to hear any comments or advice. It also became obvious that most queer couples would prefer to go out with other couples. I was told more than one time that once a gay/lesbian found a

lover, they would both disappear in the same-sex social worlds until they broke up. Quite a few queer couples affirmed with me that they only hang out with other queer couples because only these couples share mutual topics with them. Thus, Jin always accompanied me when I went to meet a couple. At some point, she became as familiar with them as me, and we went on a few trips with queer couples.

After making a considerable number of new queer friends in Shenzhen and the surrounding areas, I inevitably acquired more roles than I expected. For single non-heterosexual people, I became a reliable match-maker. Some non-heterosexual people asked me to present my findings of queer relationships to persuade their partners to come out to their parents. “So, what do they (other non-heterosexual people) do?” was frequently asked in casual conversations. Some participants working in the ART industry wanted to use my queer network to search for potential clients, as they asked me to recommend their IVF/surrogacy service to non-heterosexual people who planned to have children. Having so many queer friends also led to issues around trust, as a few potential respondents didn’t see me as a stranger-researcher who would keep their secrets but a friend who may leak their secrets to mutual social contacts. My solution was to extend my social network as broadly as possible and avoid staying in only one social circle. In the later phase of fieldwork, I was in more frequent contact with five same-sex couples and four single queer parents.

My fieldwork also involves studying ‘up’ as many of my friend-informants are older than me and have a considerable income which positioned them in a relatively high social position. Our age gap directly affected how we talked to each other since showing respect to the senior was considered a moral standard in Chinese society. For non-heterosexual people in *xinghun* marriages and those with children, Jin and I were a younger queer couple who would sooner or later be in a similar situation. Being older and more experienced in the workplace, they felt obliged to guide Jin and me. Older friend-informants frequently advised us on how to maintain a long-lasting relationship and how to raise children together. On the one hand, I could tell that they felt relatively relaxed and talkative with a junior; on the other hand, I found that the linkage between seniority and authority could lead to hierarchical relations. Sometimes, their advice could make me uncomfortable, and I had to make peace with different opinions. For example, a friend-respondent tried to persuade me to find a gay man for *xinghun* (contract marriage) and

suggested that I select a *xinghun* partner after I said I wouldn't marry a gay man. In another case, a queer couple encouraged us to conceive as soon as possible because our uterus "couldn't wait". I then realised that they assumed we shared common values with them and we must follow their life patterns. In such circumstances, I chose to challenge their assumptions and even their authority instead of being an acquiescent junior note-taker. In this way, we could enter into a dialogue and step into each other's community space (Gusterson 1997). Therefore, through my effort to negotiate my role as both a non-judgmental researcher and a young Chinese queer woman in their social worlds, my relationships with them were also shifting. I found a few older non-heterosexual people started to take my professional status seriously and pay attention to my research progress after intense debates.

Key themes and short notes were recorded on my cell phone or notebook when I was with friend-informants. I wrote diaries along with field notes to allow myself to reflect on my subjective experience and embodied knowledge. Fieldwork calls for one's attention to the ethnographic encounter and the intersubjective relationship between ethnographers and informants. Reflexivity "implied a conscious reflection on the interpretative nature of fieldwork, the construction of ethnographic authority, the interdependence of ethnographer and informant, and the involvement of the ethnographer's self in fieldwork" (Robben 2006: 443). Inspired by the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s, Okely also contends that "in an academic context the personal is theoretical" (1992:9). Fieldwork is undoubtedly an emotional and (inter)personal experience for the researcher and the researched. The lived interactions, participatory experience, and embodied knowledge that take place in fieldwork are both personal and theoretical. As Blackwood (1995) points out, anthropologists cannot remain alien or undefined in the field. My field experience indicates that the relations between me and my friend-respondents were not constantly equal and stable but rather shifting; so was my positionality. It is illusionary to think of the fieldworker's position as neutral, stable, detached, and out of cultural categories (Okely & Callaway 1992, see also Cohen 1992, Gearing 1995, Altork 1995). My ethnicity, gender, age, class, and even relationship status affected the very way I viewed my research participants and the way they view me. I understand that if I conducted fieldwork as a senior foreign researcher or as a person who identified as straight, I would still have done the research, but it would have been different. After my fieldwork came to an end, I remain in touch with most of my friend-informants and

continue to learn about the major events in their lives via social media. To me, the observation is never-ending, only shifting across different contexts.

As A ‘Native’ And as Queer

As a Chinese queer woman, this research is rooted in my life experience. I am a native ethnographer, an insider, and an outsider from many perspectives. Such positions are simultaneously beneficial and problematic. Anthropology began as the study of ‘others’. An ethnographer, at one time, “was an outsider for whom virtually everything could be regarded as ‘different’” (Wolcott 2008: 144). The purpose of ethnography, to “grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his version of his world” (Malinowski 1922:25), is often challenging to non-native anthropologies as they run the risk of never developing an intimate and inside understanding of the society. Yet, the easy assumption that native anthropologists’ insider status is unproblematic has been overturned (Davies 2008, Fitzgerald 1999). The native/non-native identity is often compared to an insider/outsider dichotomy; nevertheless, an anthropologist's double role is proved neither stable nor incompatible in ethnographic works. Narayan calls for work that melts down the divides and “acknowledge the hybrid and positioned nature of our identities” (1993:682). Also, the emic and etic viewpoints are not necessarily conditioned by one’s native identity and insider role; rather, they are dynamically shifting in the fieldwork’s subject experience and consequently in the forms of knowledge that ethnographers produce. The underlying concept raised by Narayan is that the identity of an anthropologist - like any other - is “shifting, multiplex, and situated in specific sociological and historical context” (Lewin & Leap 1996:7, see also Altorki & El-Solh 1988).

My experience of ‘being Chinese’ and ‘being queer’ undoubtedly shapes my role, my motivation, and my subjectivity in my research. Growing up in China, I had taken my Chineseness for granted. I rarely questioned the norms, as they were ‘natural’ to me. Such certainty was destabilised after I went to the United States to obtain my bachelor’s degree. Having experienced being a foreigner for years in Euro-American societies, the sense of otherness came to my understanding. Due to an increasing interest in the concept of ‘culture’ and the complexities it opens, I went to study social and cultural anthropology for a Master’s degree in the UK and continued to pursue doctoral studies. Those years of studying and working abroad have genuinely changed my understanding of ‘nativeness’

and ‘foreignness’ as I moved back and forth between China and other countries. I am aware that familiarity with society is neither a privilege nor an obstacle to a native researcher. To cite Eriksen, “what is ‘home’ and what is ‘abroad’ is no longer always clear” (2010:29).

Despite being in lesbian communities for years, I had struggled with ‘picking’ my identities. I cannot count how many times people have tried to put me in a category such as a P, bisexual, or lesbian, so they might figure out how to talk with me in an appropriate manner. Yet, I recognise that these categories, such as T/P roles, are not seamlessly stable and often cause confusion. I will unpack this matter when I explore queer intimate relationships in Chapter 3. Over the last years, meeting gender and sexual minorities in different cultural spaces and reading queer theory have constantly shaped my subject position within queer communities. Noticing how people around me understood and used these seeming categorical terms differently also became my motivation to complete this research. That is why I use ‘queer’ to unsettle the over-categorisation or false binaries. Instead of answering theoretically what these role categories in queer communities are, I am more interested in exploring ethnographically what work these categories do in their daily practices.

My personal experience indeed intersects with my development as a researcher and my objectives for fieldwork. I hope my research will contribute to academic as well as to queer politics, and this continues to be my aspiration. On the other hand, the risk of over-rapport needs to be carefully avoided, and the interconnections between gender, sexualness and class in the field should be made visible. Ever since I started fieldwork, I have realised that sharing a similar cultural identity doesn’t necessarily mean sharing similar experiences and values. Thus, I constantly felt partially an insider and partially an outsider. The purpose of including my autobiography is not to strengthen my authorship but to inform how my friend-respondents and I relate to each other as both individuals and cultural categories in the field. Drawing from gay and lesbian anthropologists’ experiences, Lewin and Leap suggest that “in many contexts it is being an anthropologist that defines experience and identity even more than particular characteristics such as race, gender, or for that matter, sexual orientation” (1996:15). Therefore, my multiple cultural identities and the intersubjective relationship between me and my friend-informants were taken into reflection at every research stage. I don’t intend to conceal my subjectivity and

involvement in fieldwork. To cite Callaway, “her own life was her fieldwork” (1992:42). By allowing the ethnographer’s self to investigate my life, I take a position as neither an authentic representative of my culture nor a detached observer.

Analysing Fieldwork Data

Data analysis has been a process since the very beginning of this research. As mentioned above, my fieldwork data consist of field notes and diaries, interview transcripts, government publications, media reports, personal blogs, online posts, and photos. It should be noted that some news reports on governmental affairs and surrogacy have been removed from their original websites while being republished/archived by other news websites, thus making it difficult to identify the original source and date. The fieldwork data is partial and unruly and shouldn’t be interpreted as social truths (Davies 2008, Strathern 2004, Tyler 1986). It is often noted that having alleged full participation and close relationship with informants doesn’t automatically promise a good ethnography (Davies 2008). The questions to address then are how I make sense of the incompleteness of data I collected and make visible my theoretical pathway through the data.

Being treated as an ordinary queer woman and being included in my friend-informants’ social worlds was part of my fieldwork. At the same time, the academic training I received allows me to critically investigate and reflect on my experience with my friend-informants using a queer anthropologist’s perspective. This means to be sensible about the tensions created by multiple taken-for-granted binaries that are not limited to everyday practice/theory, researcher/informant, insider/outsider, Western/Oriental. The inconsistent use of ‘gay/lesbian’ and ‘queer’ is always a contested topic in the house of anthropology. By explaining my biography, my motivation and standpoint in the previous section, I have made clear that I don’t intend to use ‘queer’ to label my friend-informants as a static social group; rather, this research aims to stress the fluidity and mobility of ‘queer’ as both a process of doing and a method (Boellstorff 2010), an analytic (Weiss 2016).

All interview and fieldwork notes were organised and analysed with the assistance of Nvivo software. As mentioned earlier, I wrote down the notes and friend-respondents’ exact words in Chinese and translated them into English afterwards. Every time I met a new friend-informant, I created a folder in Nvivo and continued to add relevant notes to

it. I produced a fieldwork report every month. The ethnographic data were linked with Nvivo nodes (themes), including queer parenthood, marriage, urban life, and love. During fieldwork, I reviewed the data and nodes every month to identify recurring themes and keywords.

Fieldwork is a liminal experience, and it is of crucial importance to make sense of liminality (Johnson 1984). This involves acknowledging the major barriers to reflective subjectivity such as age, gender, and professional status (Fitzgerald 1999). Although I have conducted as many interviews with queer men as with queer women, most of my key friend-informants were women. I spent a lot more leisure time with queer women than men as it was easier for me to build rapport with women and join their daily social activities. Besides, I am aware that the fact I don't have children has restricted my access to the social groups of queer parents. Such othering was especially obvious when respondents simply put, "you will understand me when you have children". Most of the queer parents willing to participate in this research were entrepreneurs known for being 'successful' and 'moral' queer parents, and queer parents from the working class remained under-researched in this thesis. These limitations are critically examined along with the data. After all, valid ethnographic accounts can be produced "without complete participation and total acquisition of local knowledge by ethnographers so long as they honestly examine, and make visible in their analysis, the basis of their knowledge claims in reflexive experience" (Davies 2008:104).

The data I collected is not interpreted as if it is from a self-contained field site. For me, the idea of a physically and temporal bounded field was especially problematic. Did I leave my field site when I finished dinner with my friend-informants? Did my fieldwork simply exclude the moments when I went out with my straight friends in Shenzhen? This confusion arose as once one of my straight female friends mentioned her interest in the American TV show *Queer Eye* and played a short video clip while we were in a foot SPA room; the masseurs stared at our screen for a while and abruptly asked, "are these sissy guys *tongxinglian* (homosexual)? Are *tongxinglian* all like that?" Realising the masseurs were making fun of the queer hosts in the show, my friend and I stopped watching it, and both felt uncomfortable. After we walked out of the SPA centre, my friend said, "you were too nice trying to explain to them; you knew what they were gonna say". We knew that *tongxinglian* was still stigmatised as a mental disorder in school textbooks and linked

with HIV on media platforms. I couldn't help relating this to my friend-respondents' endorsement of public tolerance toward homosexuality, as these two dramatically opposing situations happened in the same city. When my friend-respondents contended that urban China is tolerant toward homosexuality, what space and people did they really refer to? Our everyday interactions with all other individuals (besides queer participants) imply multiple lived realities that cannot be neglected as irrelevant to research. In studying how changing social and legal realities shape the personal lives of families of choice in Poland, Mizelińska and Stasińska (2017) stress the importance of geo-temporal attentiveness to avoiding false universalism. Taking an intersectional approach, I examine Chinese social policies, media reports and online posts to situate queer personal life within the wider social-economic and political context (Mills 2018, see also Hildebrandt 2018).

Furthermore, queer theory emerges as a critique that resists not only the normativity of heterosexuality but also a wider field including ethnographic methodology. To what extent can we say a methodology is queered? On the one hand, we are encouraged to study queer theory as radical, transgressive, resistant, and anti-normative. On the other hand, what counts as normative and what counts as transgressive in the production of queer scholarship might already be normalised (Lewin 2016, Weiss 2016, Wilson 2006, Weston 1991). So are the questions with who are the queer people worth studying and what is the queer practice worth documenting and theorising. In discussing the writing of ethnography, Hastrup (1992) reveals the inherently hierarchical relationship between ethnographer and informant. No matter how equal and intimate we are in the field, it is me, the anthropologist, who reframes informants' stories into text with my choice of fieldwork materials. As a researcher who decided to study non-heterosexual intimate and familial life in urban China, I quickly found my friend-informants to be different from the queer activists depicted in most queer scholarship, perhaps in an unexciting way. When queer activists quickly responded and took action in most oppressive events, my friend-informants seemed silent and accommodating. Even when the 'les' and relevant topics were being removed from major Chinese social media platforms in April 2019, many of my friend-informants didn't demonstrate any anger or concern. They showed little interest in LGBT pride events and online protests. Yet this doesn't mean that only the practices that visibly resist mainstream norms should be defined as 'queer'. While they seem so different from each other, it is problematic to deem one more 'queer' and

the other more ‘assimilative’/ ‘ordinary’ and erase the possibilities of exploring the complexity of their lived realities. Following Lewin’s reminder to “base our conclusions on what our informants say and do, rather than using what our informants say and do to sustain already formulated ideas” (2016:604), this ethnography is also my effort to realise and resist such hierarchies in ethnography that seeks to universalise queerness.

Ethics

My research is guided by the 2012 Ethics Statement of the American Anthropological Association. I have explained the purpose of my research in detail to every respondent and obtained their consent before moving to the next stage. I brought a consent form to every interview. Although many said that they trusted me and didn’t need the form, I sent a digital copy to everyone via email or WeChat. The administrator of each online chat group I have joined was informed of my research and made the decision of either letting me in or removing me from the group. Furthermore, I frequently update the status of my studies on my social media page.

Research participants’ personal information is securely protected and made anonymous in all documents. Three informants are queer-identified micro-celebrities themselves and acknowledge the use of their actual web names. Although my research involves queer parenting, I didn’t interview people under 18 years old. All of my respondents are adults. Furthermore, I always consider the possible effects of revealing my research findings. It is rooted in my tacit knowledge not to suppress the research participants’ voice or view them as generalisable. The goal is not to generalise about Chinese gender and sexual minorities or to evaluate their practices as ideal or wrong. As Tyler argues, the point of discourse is not “how to make a better representation, but how to avoid representation” (1986:128).

Chapter 3 Practicing Intimate Relationships

This chapter explores the practices of same-sex intimacy in relations to the shifting understandings of role terms, romantic love, risk, and moral norms. It articulates non-heterosexual people's changing attitude toward different modes of same-sex relationships, as the once seeming gendered relationship modes received mixed comments in today's queer communities. It moves to discuss non-heterosexual people's expectations and concerns when they seek same-sex lovers in a big city. It shouldn't be discounted that queer couples in this ethnography were heterogeneous in terms of their age, educational background, and social status, and therefore their attitudes and practices need to be apprehended within their social context. As one of the most prominent economic hubs and migrant-attracting cities, Shenzhen and Guangzhou were the desirable sites to explore non-heterosexual people's migrating experience, Chinese social change and career opportunities, and urban utopia. This chapter also documents queer couples' existing strategies for seeking and sustaining their loving relationships. It demonstrates how queer couples' practices of conjugal love relates to existing discourses on class, economic capital, and law.

Shifting Modes of Same-Sex Relationships

It was impossible to neglect the frequent use of role terms '1/0/0.5/T/P/H' in Chinese queer social spaces, which I will elucidate the meanings with reflective accounts. When I showed up with Jin as a couple in lesbian get-togethers, T/P roles were frequently brought out as an ice-breaker topic. During our first dinner with a same-sex couple, Zhenzhen and Fei, they started the conversation with T/P roles:

Zhenzhen: "So, who is the T and who is the P (of you two)?"

Me: "You are welcome to make a guess."

Fei: "It was hard to guess! When Zhan and I first saw you and Jin, we thought you were T and Jin were P because you had short hair and Jin had long hair. But Jin seems more mature and caring. Neither of you looks like a typical T."

Me: "You are right. It would be better to say we are H (*bufen*/versatile). Let me guess, Zhenzhen is T?"

Zhenzhen: "It is obvious (laugh). You can tell from my sporty clothing style and Fei's long dress. Fei looks very *zhi* (straight)!"

The term ‘T’ stands for ‘Tomboy’, and ‘P’ is short for ‘*Po* (female)’ or ‘pretty girl’. In this sense, ‘T’ and ‘P’ appear to be two role terms complementary to each other. Zhenzhen and Fei and many other queer women tried to look for personality traits that might reveal one’s T/P roles during the first meet. Likewise, 1/0 jargons were widely used in gay communities. The term ‘1’ graphically indicates an inserter, and the term ‘0’ graphically indicates a circle inserted in bed. ‘1’ is equivalent to ‘*gong*’ (top, literally meaning ‘attack’), and ‘0’ is equivalent to ‘*shou*’ (bottom, literally meaning ‘receive’). The 1-0 model thus reflects a strong sense of binary opposition of sexual roles both graphically and linguistically.

The T-P relationship model and the 1-0 relationship model in same-sex communities arose in mainland China years later than the butch-femme in the States and tomboy-femme structures in Southeast Asia. They first emerged as popular subcultures in Taiwan and then rapidly prevailed in the queer communities in mainland China through the Internet. They became jargons, sex roles, subcultures, and performative styles in Taiwan (Chao 1999) and mainland China (Engebretsen 2008, Kam 2013, Zheng 2015). Kong (2010) and Zheng (2015) observe that the 1-0 roles reflect stereotypically gendered personalities in gay communities (1 being active and independent, 0 being passive and dependent). Broadly speaking, 0s engaged in stereotypically feminine behaviours, including wearing make-up, discussing skincare, and calling friends who are also 0 ‘sister’. In queer social space, a man who said he is 0 to others usually implied that he was looking for a 1 as his lover. Likewise, a woman in a relationship with a T usually refers to herself as P. In other words, role and desire were often mutually exclusive, as a 1 was expected to date a 0 and a T was expected to date a P when they introduced themselves using the terms. T-T couples and 0-0 couples were uncommon. I agree with Engebretsen (2008) that same-sex attraction among women was likely sensitised as opposite-attraction, and this observation could also be applied to queer men in urban China. Likewise, Engebretsen points out that ‘T’ and ‘P’ are used as adjectives in conversations to describe stereotypically gendered behaviours. Casual conversations in queer social life were preoccupied with the use of T/P and 1/0 jargon. It is crucial to note that these terms’ definition varied depending on who used the term. These terms might be used to indicate one’s dressing style, sexual preference, temperament, and economic dependency in a same-sex relationship. Furthermore, this jargon had different meanings

for non-heterosexual people from different educational backgrounds and age groups which I will discuss in the following sections.

It is worth noting that the 1/0 roles and the T/P roles in same-sex dating cultures have been studied by researchers from both inside and outside China (Zheng 2015, Zhao & Wang 2014, Engebretsen 2008, Xiaobai & Xiangqi 2006). Nevertheless, the connection between their role differentiation and wider kinship practices hasn't been explicated. In domestic studies, the T/P and 1/0 roles are often reduced to fixed categories and are depicted as informed by heterosexuality or Chinese patriarchy (Li 2007, Chen & Chen 2007, Zheng 2015). Such discourses can be problematic because they oversimplify both queer sexualities and heterosexuality by ignoring some foundational discourses on the production of gender norms and heteronormativity. Butler (1990) points out that the idea of imitation suggests that heterosexual is the 'origin' that is copied by the homosexual, whereas the originality of heterosexuality is in doubt. Since an origin would require derivations to ensure its originality, heterosexual cannot be constructed as origin if homosexuality is not constructed as imitation. In this sense, heterosexuality in fact presupposes homosexuality to ensure its originality and normativity. Heteronormativity itself is constructed in contrast to non-normative sexualities. If the distinction between masculinity and femininity, as Butler points out, is constituted to limit the performative possibilities outside the restricted frame of gender identities, it is oversimplifying to describe the T's masculine dressing style as an imitation of men or the 0's stereotypically feminine behaviours as an imitation of women. Furthermore, we need to be careful to expound on the local and historical context of heterosexuality and gender norms as they are not universal (Traub 2008). Chinese gender and family norms changed dramatically during and after the Reform era and cannot be viewed as universally static. Although T-P and 1-0 relationship models were found to be informed by stereotypically hetero-gendered norms, these terms cannot be reduced to fixed binary identities. The idea of a mature, stable, and bounded knowledge of selfhood is problematic, for identities are "multiple, ambiguous, shifting locations in matrices of power" (Kondo 1990:26).

What is more, the role categories change over time, with new trends constantly emerging in the queer community. For instance, the 'H/*bufen* (versatile, not classified)' role, which emerged outside of the T-P role division, has become popular in recent years within Chinese lesbian communities. Queer women calling themselves H are those who don't

want to put themselves into the T-P category or those who could fall in love with either T or P. Similarly, the term ‘0.5’ appears later than the 1/0 roles and has gained increasing recognition. Men who introduce themselves as 0.5 mean that they are versatile in bed and might develop an intimate relationship with either 1 or 0. 1-0 and T-P relationship models have been losing their predominance in queer communities, especially among youth, since the conception of *bufen* (versatile) showed up. As these role terms in queer intimate relationships proliferated from absolute binary to diverse blends, new analysis is needed. Borrowing from Povinelli’s analysis of radical fairies, it is not desirable to try to define these seeming categorical and gendered terms and then find those who fit the definition. Instead, we need to understand the modes of life across which these categories are “dispersed, contested, and made sensible” (2006:109). Instead of defining what they are, I am more interested in exploring what they do within queer dating and socialising cultures and wider kinship practices.

People who called themselves 1/0/0.5/T/P/H included not only self-identified gays and lesbians but multiple forms of non-normative genders and sexualness. Until the end of my fieldwork, most transgender and bisexual people remained invisible in China as the knowledge of transgender and bisexuality weren’t widely recognised. The public frequently misconceived transgender people as homosexuals, and transgender people themselves would seek intimate relations in the alleged lesbian and gay communities. Huang (2015) further complicates the T and transgender identity in Chinese lesbian culture and suggests that we understand T beyond the lesbian/transgender binary. Several Ts in my lesbian social circles, for instance, have taken the transgender men identity without giving up the T identity and continue to be active in their local lesbian social circles. Also, bisexual and sexually fluid people were using 1/0/0.5/T/P/H to introduce themselves when seeking lovers. It has been a debate on whether we may include the local recognised terms ‘*tomboy*’²⁰ (to refer to women who tend to perform stereotypically male activities) and ‘*femme*’ (to refer to women who tend to be seen as normatively gendered) in Southeast Asian countries as part of the globally-recognised ‘lesbian’ identity (Boellstorff 2007a&b, Blackwood 2005). Ethnographic studies conducted in non-Western countries have challenged the universalist assumption of sexual identity (Blackwood 2005, Boellstorff 2007a&b, Jackson 2009, Dave 2012). In this sense, it

²⁰ *Tombois* in Indonesia, *tomboy* in Malaysia, *tom* in Thailand, etc

would be mistaken to classify the practice of performing 1/0/0.5/T/P/H roles in the domain of gay and lesbian subcultures in China. Rather, these terms include a diverse range of sexual and gender practices across their ambiguous borders. Thus, I conceptualise these terms as flexible epistemologies and social practices that are consistently in transformation.

Despite the different understanding of queer role terms among younger and older generations, both agreed that T and 0 were a lot more than P and 1. A survey conducted by same-sex dating apps *Lesdo* and *Aloha* in 2017 clearly demonstrated the disproportion of T to P and 1 to 0. 44% of gay men surveyed claimed to be 0, 19% to be 1, and 37% to be 0.5. Likewise, 42% of lesbians surveyed said they were T, 21% were P, and 37% were H. The belief that 1 in the gay community and P in the lesbian community were more popular and had an easier life prevailed in everyday conversation. Every time I joined a local lesbian chatting group, the members asked, “Any new Ps? We need Ps! There is too little meat for so many wolves!” On the one hand, Ts showed passion for chasing good-looking Ps and celebrated Ps’ feminine characteristics. On the other hand, most Ts believed P was not as reliable as T, often due to P’s presumed economic dependency. Ts often assumed that the feminine-looking P had the choice to be straight and enter a heterosexual marriage whenever she wanted to do so, although I met more than a few middle-aged Ts who entered heterosexual marriages and had children with their husbands. In WeChat group chats, members often made jokes about the 1-0 ration, such as “I am probably the only 1 in this group chat for you 0s”. Many T and 0 tended to describe themselves in disadvantaged positions in same-sex intimate relationships.

For those who recognised the proliferating T/P/H/1/0/0.5 roles and their mouldability in same-sex relationships, interactions with people who still understood T/P and 1/0 roles in a binary and stereotypically gendered logic became problematic. People who employed ‘H’, ‘0.5’, and ‘*bufen*’ were relatively younger, usually born after 1990. Many post-90s friend-informants were familiar with Euro-American LGBT movies and television dramas. Some young respondents further told me that they disfavoured the whole role categories, including the Chinese words *lala* and *tongzhi*, and would only refer to themselves as ‘les’ or ‘gay’. Simultaneously, many non-heterosexual people born before 1990 didn’t recognise any role term out of the T-P/1-0 binary system. The idea that one was either T or P like one was either male or female was still held by many non-

heterosexual people, while other young urbanites felt offended to be positioned in such fixed binaries. This matter was further problematised when same-sex relationships were involved. For some non-heterosexual people, the alleged role of another potential date firmly expressed what kind of gender style this person desired, what kind of financial role this person wanted to have, and how dominant this person wanted to be as essential characteristics. For other non-heterosexual people, the roles were simply sexual preferences.

In recent years, an increasing number of gay men and lesbians have viewed the 1-0 and T-P as outdated and undesirable relationship models and tried to abandon them to a certain extent:

“Though I dislike such simple categorisation, I need to use it at some point when I am about to go to bed with someone who only acknowledges the 1-0 logic. If you don’t specify your roles in the gay dating APP, you simply get filtered by other users. Unless you don’t want a sex life, you cannot avoid using 1-0 terms as gay. However, I try to leave 1-0 roles to sexual life and avoid bringing them to everyday life. You know, even if I were a heterosexual man, I would not want my wife to stay at home without a job.” (Eric, age 24)

Eric’s words reflect many young respondents’ attitudes toward the roles terms, as they found them disturbing but had to adopt them when using same-sex dating apps

Moreover, shifting attitudes toward female masculinity and male femininity in recent years are observable. *Ye* (manly)/*tie* (literally meaning iron, referring to queer women who don’t like to be touched erotically) T and *mu* (effeminate) 0 were not only regarded as unpopular in the dating pool, obvious female masculinity and male femininity were further stigmatised as lowbrow, linked to the Chinese discourse of low quality (*suzhi*). By contrast, lesbian femininity and gay masculinity occupied a more accepted and favourable position (Wang 2019, Kong 2019). A lesbian respondent claimed:

“We are lesbians because we love women and we accept our gender. I feel those Ts don’t appreciate their female body. How can I be with a woman who looks and behaves like a man? We should date each other as lesbians, not as heterosexuals.” (Yina, age 28)

In her words, female masculinity, similar to male effeminacy, was described as gender unconformity and therefore degraded to lesbian inauthenticity. The argument that the

rigid T-P relationship was just the same-sex version of the traditional heterosexual relationship was used by many young queer women who spoke against the T-P model. The trend for seeing T/P roles as more traditional and lower class didn't just occur in Chinese society, but in other Asian societies as well (Blackwood 2005, Boellstorff 2007a).

Some of my friend-informants changed their clothing and performative styles following changing preferences in queer communities. I have known Billy since high school. She was a typical *ye* T as a teenager, chose a typical male English name as her nickname, performed a visibly masculine gender style, and only dated *zhinv*²¹ (straight girls). She didn't need to find girlfriends via online communities since her masculine look attracted girls at school regardless of their sexual identities. In other words, her strong T-ness made her interest in women obvious. Although she was proud to have had so many 'straight (*zhinv*)' girlfriends, she also criticised the instability of such relationships, saying, "No matter how generous I am, they will abandon me and find a man sooner or later". In other words, Billy saw her *zhinv* girlfriends as women who lived normative lives and thus wouldn't develop long-lasting relationships with a T. During her study in the U.S., she developed an intimate relationship with a queer woman, who was also the first one who took an active sex role in bed with her. After graduating from university, Billy started to introduce herself as a *niang* (feminine/sissy) T to others and started wearing light make-up. She also grew her hair from a short crew cut to her shoulders. When we met again in Shenzhen, Billy half-joked, "*niang* (feminine) T is popular these days".

Billy's choice regarding her performative style and role in same-sex relationships was both individual and socially contextual. During high school, Billy dressed as masculine as she could, mainly to impress straight girls. In the early 2000s, T-style female singers such as Li Yuchun emerged in popular music, and their styles were deemed fashionable among both queer and straight women (Kam 2013). Dating a T-style girl was considered fashionable among girls at our high school, while such relationships were also considered unserious and playful. At the time Billy graduated from university and entered the lesbian social circle in Shenzhen, she realised that breast-binding and having crew cut hair were understood as backward practices among young middle-class lesbians. The shifting

²¹ Many Ts referred their girlfriends and ex-girlfriends as straight women if they had dated men before or started intimate relationship with men after breaking up with them; they rarely used 'bisexual' to describe their girlfriends and ex-girlfriends' sexuality.

attitude towards the masculine T-style was visible as female masculinity became increasingly linked to low quality (*suzhi*) and lesbian inauthenticity (Wang 2019). Rather, lesbian femininity was considered to be the ‘true’ model of lesbianism. A T respondent mobilised T-ness beyond a visible masculine gender performance when interviewed:

“I used to have short hair and an obvious manly T style as I felt I had to be like men to date women. My ex-girlfriend made me realise that she liked me even if I dressed feminine. I have long hair now and still attract Ps. As I grew older and got into a serious relationship, the T-P binary became too *biaomian* (superficial, ostensible) for me.” (Danny, age 29)

Danny’s description of T/P roles as *biaomian* could be interpreted in two ways. *Biaomian* literally means surface or superficial, which implies that T/P roles are not linked with one’s inner feeling of self. Also, *biaomian* indicates the T/P roles only seem to be fixed truths, while they can be easily broken or adjusted. Danny used the discourse of *biaomian* to mobilise the T/P roles beyond an observable masculinity/femininity binary as she chose to make her T-ness less obvious without it affecting her lesbianism. Although Billy changed her dressing style and sexual role, she still saw herself as T (rather than H) due to her preference for a T-P relationship mode and her financial independence. Billy and her P-girlfriend lived in Billy’s apartment with Billy’s parents. Billy had her own business and didn’t require her girlfriend to earn an income. Instead, she was satisfied that her girlfriend was more than willing to cook for her. In other words, for Billy and Danny, the fundamental trait of being a desirable T had shifted away from observable masculine styles to more delicate and flexible practices which could be negotiated in conjugal relationships. Therefore, Billy and Danny’s accounts suggest that T/P roles are relationally apprehended and practiced in queer relationships.

The innovative use of 1/0/0.5/T/P/H-related slang in queer communities further shows their elasticity. Ben, a self-identified gay man studying sociology at a university in Guangzhou, told me he would rather say he was 0.75. He explained:

“Although I like to be 1(top) in bed, I don’t want to miss good guys just because they are not 0. After all, dating is not just about sex.”

Ben introduced himself as 0.75 in the gay community because it would expand the range of his potential dates. In this case, the 1/0 roles were not interpreted as a binary system of sexual roles but a spectrum where one could adjust one’s position from 0 to 1. Ben also

described his ex-boyfriends as positioned somewhere between 0 and 0.5. In Ben's case, the 1-0 binary was merely an issue in bed, and he needed to mobilise such a binary because he desired a life partner rather than a sex partner.

In short, queer subjects' attitudes toward same-sex relationship modes and their use of role terms are diverse and elastic. The emergence of H and 0.5 roles as versatile, as well as the shifting attitude toward male femininity and female masculinity in same-sex dating cultures across different generations have inevitably produced hierarchy of same-sex relationships models. Younger non-heterosexual people emphasised that same-sex relationships should be equal and inter-dependent in terms of emotional, sexual, and economic roles. They also showed a tendency to delink their sexual roles from division of labour in their domestic life. Many criticised the T-P and 1-0 relationships as being informed by traditional Chinese gender culture while celebrating the versatile (*bufen*) couples as being infused with modern gay and lesbian culture. Yet, such arguments also revealed that non-heterosexual people tended to perceive heterosexual relationships in a timeless and fixed model in which the man/husband was dominant and caring and the woman/wife was submissive and dependent. In this sense, heterosexual relationships, like T-P and 1-0 relationships, were reduced to abstract discourses similar to what Danny described as *biaomian* (superficial, ostensible). Regardless of roles they identify with, queer couples in this ethnography have demonstrated a capacity to be fluid in practicing conjugal relations, *xinghun* (contract) marriages, coming out, and parenting.

Seeking Reliable Lovers, Avoiding Risks

“Things are different today. There are so many more platforms for us to find a same-sex lover compared to old times, but these are all unreliable (*bu kaopu*).” (Sally, age 33)

I repeatedly heard this statement from respondents in meetups. Many respondents showed their concerns about the extended same-sex social sites in today's LGBT world.

The emergence of queer social spaces and communities in urban China as a result of the wide access to the Internet and rapid economic reform in recent decades have been recognised in various research (Rofel 2007, Wei 2007, Ho 2010, Kam 2013, Engebretsen 2014, Fu 2015, Zheng 2015, Bao 2018). Nowadays, one could locate other non-heterosexual people online through either mainstream Chinese social media platforms

such as *Weibo*, *Tieba*, *Douban* or same-sex exclusive dating apps such as *BlueD* and *Rela*. There were more than five gay bars and four lesbian bars in Shenzhen by 2018. How did these social sites, from cyberspace to consumerist semi-public spaces, transform non-heterosexual people's perceptions and experiences of same-sex relationships?

According to my friend-respondents, meeting someone randomly at a bar or nightclub was undoubtedly the least reliable way to find true love. This conception prevailed not only in Chinese queer communities but in Chinese society more generally. Most respondents said they never or rarely consumed drinks at exclusively gay and lesbian bars. Some of them had visited these bars out of curiosity and were disappointed to find the music and performances to be in poor taste and the atmosphere licentious. According to many respondents, bars and nightclubs were places exclusively for people looking for casual sex rather than serious relationships. Some complained about the poor-mannered waiters or waitresses whom they perceived as uneducated. In this sense, gay and lesbian bars became consumer spaces gated by erotic desires and economic capital, while cultural indicators of artistic taste, education, and the etiquette of middle-class status in these spaces were absent (Wei 2020). Distinct from gay bars, queer film clubs and *tongzhi* activist groups emerged as cultural spaces that genuinely exclude non-heterosexual people who lack cultural capital and are recognised as neither middle class nor good cultural citizens within the community (Wei 2020, see also Bao 2018, Kong 2010, Rofel 2007).

Among the 20 same-sex couples I interviewed and spent a great deal of time with, more than half of them met their partners through social media. Meeting new friends and lovers within online sociality modes has become increasingly common for non-heterosexual people in first-tier cities like Shenzhen. Online interactions became an important element in people's offline lives. The online world should not be seen as a self-contained sphere separate from everyday offline activities (Miller & Slater 2003, Miller et al. 2016). The prevailing online mode of sociality among both heterosexual and non-heterosexual people in China not only signified the blurred boundary between online and offline life but also signified the increasing interactions between strangers in contemporary China.

Before the analysis of same-sex dating practices, I will briefly introduce the context of personal interactions and social trust between strangers in Chinese society. Traditionally,

Chinese society was organised through different types of social circles where the individual's moral duties were specifically identified in accordance with their positionality in each social relation (Fei 1992 [1947]). In such a world of acquaintances, people relied on personal trust cultivated from long term interactions within the same social circles. In this sense, one's reputation and moral worth were relationally defined mainly through kin ties and work networks. The rapid modernisation and urbanisation in China resulted in increasing interactions among strangers who shared no past (Yan 2011, Lee 2014). As Yan (2011) points out, the rapid changes in Chinese social life cannot be perceived alone without considering the shifting ethical discourse and moral practice. I would further add that we mustn't exclude non-heterosexual people's everyday life when disclosing such transformations in Chinese social life.

“You thought you knew the person as you talked with each other for so long, but you would find out she was faking her personality and background once you were in a relationship”. (Sally, age 33)

At a dinner with other *lala* friends, Sally complained about her recent ex-girlfriend, whom she met via a *lala* WeChat group chat. It is common for a regionally-themed gay or *lala* chat group to organise an offline get-together on a regular basis for members to meet each other in person. The primary (and unspoken) purpose of these offline social activities was to find a date. The get-together usually took the form of a casual dinner and might progress to a bar or a KTV night with alcohol. According to Sally, she was purposefully ‘picked up’ by her ex-girlfriend among all in that group chat because of her decent job and house ownership in the city centre. In their first offline group meetup, Sally was kissed by her. They became girlfriends and frequented each other's flats. It didn't take too long for Sally to discover that her pretty girlfriend was conducting ambiguous relationships with several other lesbians. Furthermore, Sally believed she was taken advantage of by her ex-girlfriend financially. After telling this story, Sally also talked about her puppy love in high school. Sally and her first girlfriend were classmates, and they fell in love when Sally didn't even know the meaning of the word lesbian. Their romantic relationship lasted for 6 years until they graduated from university and moved to different cities to work. Sally's second girlfriend was her colleague and their cohabitating relationship lasted for 2 years. Both Sally's first and second girlfriends were married to heterosexual men in recent years, and Sally called them ‘*zhinv*’ (straight women). Although Sally referred to her earlier relationships with her first and second

girlfriends as pure love with a nostalgic undertone, she admitted that she didn't want to be hurt by *zhinv* anymore, and her only option was to use the online social media platforms to find a lesbian-identified lover.

I met Sally in April 2019, only shortly after she ended her 3-month relationship with her ex and came back to the lesbian social circles to seek a potential girlfriend. Sally remained critical of same-sex dating Apps and online forums. During another get-together, Sally warned others not to reveal their real names and jobs when they started dating someone on the Internet. Many agreed with Sally and revealed their fears of being cheated or swindled. The conversation continued as we discussed when it was appropriate to disclose personal details. Someone argued it would be fine to talk about one's background after a few dates, and someone said she and her girlfriend never see each other's IDs until they were together for a year. There was no clear line between being too naive and being too suspicious of the other. At that time, we were all using nicknames, and I was the only one who disclosed my job position and affiliated institute. I had queer friends whose legal names I knew, went to their flats and workplaces, and met their colleagues while building such rapport from online relations could take months and even years. The second time I met Sally, I asked her if she would participate in my research. Like many other respondents, she gave me her consent but never her full legal name. I never asked for respondents' full names, either. The tendency for queer women to use nicknames and only talk about their love life without giving details about their family and job in T-bars in Taiwan has been described as 'fictive real' (Chao 1999) and can be extended to emerging queer social spaces in urban China.

Sally's attitude towards online dating was neither representative nor rare. For many respondents, especially those born before 1990, there was a sharp distinction between meeting a person in 'real life' and meeting a person through the 'virtual web'. Real-life encounters happened in school, workplace, volunteer groups and other established social organisations where people at least shared certain mutual networks and memberships. On the other hand, people without pre-existing social relations were strangers. This was further pronounced in online interactions which were often anonymous in the beginning. While non-heterosexual people like Sally preferred to develop intimate relationships with people from established offline social webs, they were aware of the small dating pool in 'real life'. The idea of seeking lovers from online platforms evoked manifold uncertainties

and risks in Chinese society, heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals alike. One could not consult any mutual acquaintance or authority member about another stranger's socio-economic background and moral worth.

During my fieldwork, this was a story spreading in the major online lesbian communities. A woman who claimed to be P and working in Shenzhen met several Ts from a lesbian-themed forum and became girlfriends with them after they met offline. This woman then pretended to suffer serious family crises and borrowed money from these Ts from time to time. Eventually, one T found out that her job title had been falsified and exposed her to multiple online forums. The story became heated as other T victims of fraud showed up one by one to expose the P swindler's personal details. Other than borrowing money, there were a lot more examples of fraud. Some lesbians claimed the swindlers persuaded them to invest in their fictitious commodities or play the lottery in made-up websites. One of my friends, who identified as T, was once contacted by a P via the lesbian socialising app *Rela*; it turned out the P tried to ask my friend to purchase a gym membership. At the same time, I saw a growing number of posts warning single queer people about swindlers. "Of course we are the target of fraud. We are lonely and desperate for love and pretty girls! All swindlers need to do is to post a fake photo!" a T concluded. It appeared that the T was more frequently the victim of fraud, taking on the financial provider role. In such narratives, the victim T was often portrayed by themselves and others as like the male victim who was fooled by a pretty woman through online dating.

Fu (2015) has explored the gay social sites in Shenyang which changed from urban public spaces in the 1980s to consumer-driven spaces in the 21st century. Same-sex desires in the old days were characterised as 'simple' and 'nice' when one didn't have to worry about property safety or health risks. Same-sex desire in the recent decade was regarded as dangerous when male-male sex consumption, swindling activities, and HIV risks visibly increased. While Fu's research doesn't focus on gay social media platforms, online interactions and offline interactions are inseparable and equally valid in queer daily life. Like Fu's respondents, my respondents have blamed the capitalist system as the main reason behind the lowering of the moral bottom line and loss of trust among strangers. Economic reform has contributed to the growth of individual mobility and simultaneously formed unequal social strata. As a result, most Chinese individuals "had to internalize the negative impacts of individualization by assuming more responsibilities, experiencing

greater uncertainty and risk, and working harder” (Kleinman et al. 2011:15). Non-heterosexual people seeking lovers, in this case, had to learn to recognise suspicious behaviour in dates.

Being involved in fraud or extortion when dating was understood as an example of extreme immoral behaviour by most Chinese people but, unfortunately, it had a great negative impact on personal trust in the social world. Moreover, encountering swindlers was just one of the worries non-heterosexual people had. In the case of same-sex online dating, one might easily justify their moral values and behavioural norms as they were interacting with people completely outside their circle of social relations. Guan, a 29-year-old lesbian mother in a gay-lesbian *xinghun* marriage, told me that she didn’t understand why some lesbian WeChat groups required every new member to provide her photo on the group chat:

“What is the point of knowing other group members’ faces? I don’t feel comfortable letting strangers know what I look like before we meet in person. Their rules make me feel that I am wrong to value my privacy! Anyway, I have my solution. Every time they requested my photo, I just sent a photo of a random woman downloaded from the Internet. I will never reveal my details on the Internet.”

Guan’s argument revealed the conflicting moral norms in the lesbian community. Guan framed her behaviour of sending fake photos to other lesbians as a good habit not to trust strangers. Yet, such behaviour would be characterised as cheating and cowardly by many other gay men and lesbians, especially those born after 1990, under the rhetoric of coming out politics:

“If they don’t even dare to show their faces on same-sex socialising sites and come out to us, how can you count on them to come out to straight people?” (Yina, age 28).

Later during the dinner, Guan mentioned she was also hiding her married and parental status in online lesbian groups because she wanted to increase her opportunity for finding a girlfriend:

“Lesbians like me who got married and have children have little chance to find a girlfriend. Other lesbians heard you are married, no matter *xinghun* (contract marriage) or *zhihun* (marriage with heterosexual people), they stop replying to your message and run away without giving you a second chance. When they can find an unmarried lesbian, why choose us?”

Although in my research there were several queer couples who didn't see each other's married status as essentially troubling, Guan's prior experience discouraged her from revealing her status as married and a mother co-parenting with a gay man. Indeed, my other post-90s friend-respondents have blamed gay men and lesbians who chose to enter heterosexual marriages as being dependent and lacking negotiating power with their parents, thus having no right to enter same-sex conjugal relations. According to Guan, her situation left her no other choice but to get married. Guan's parents in her hometown had been expecting her to have offspring. Guan had a stable job in a state-owned enterprise and enjoyed well-off life, but not well-off enough to raise a child by herself. Yet bisexual and lesbian women like Guan who were in heterosexual marriages and in the meantime presented themselves as single were regarded as a negative example in today's online queer communities. For most young non-heterosexual people in first-tier cities like Shenzhen, hiding one's married status to same-sex lovers was morally intolerable. Nevertheless, one must be observant of such behaviours because others might easily pretend their status without feeling what they did were immoral.

I suggest the uncertain path from unrelated intimate stranger to real-life partner symbolises the uncertainty in the Chinese moral standards as they are relationally defined in accordance with one's positionality in a given social relation. When non-heterosexual people develop an intimate relationship with an individual completed outside their established social webs, their sentiments, health, and money are all at potential risks that they must internalise by themselves. Such a shift in same-sex relationships in recent decades needs to be understood within both the context of global queer politics and the rapid modernisation and ethical shifts in urban China.

In mainstream culture, heterosexual dating apps such as *Momo*²² are often characterised as hook-up sites which serve the purpose of *yuepao* (getting laid with strangers). The reputation of being a *yuepao* app is linked with the low possibility of finding a good 'quality (*suzhi*)' partner that one may develop a serious relationship with (Liu 2016). I intend to employ Wei (2020)'s metaphor of queer gated communities to understand the shifting social sites. Gated communities, as Wei describes, deal with social inclusion and

²² *Momo* is a popular Chinese dating/hook-up social media.

exclusion of non-heterosexual people in the wider society and within queer communities (2020: 132). For most of my respondents who were not interested in queer films and activist activities, cyberspace has become an essential cultural space for them to identify other potential queer lovers with similar artistic tastes, educational backgrounds, and social status. At the same time, the anonymity and practices of faking cultural capital have called online communities' role as queer cultural spaces into question. In this sense, same-sex dating sites were not only situated between 'radical' and 'conservative' sexual attitudes/lifestyles but also situated between casual/temporal and serious/stable relationships. I suggest the same-sex socialising apps serve ambiguous social functions. Most respondents didn't want to use same-sex themed forums and apps as they argued these, once 'pure', online same-sex socialising platforms were 'contaminated' by people who just wanted to hook up. These criticisms of non-heterosexual people seeking casual sex often went further to damaging the overall image of sexual minorities. To further problematise this matter, many of my friends-respondents referred to online dating as a less preferred, less effective method but the only option for them to extend their dating pools. Rong, a 26-year-old single gay man, explained:

"Every time I opened *BlueD*, I got messages from strangers asking for one-night stands. Well, I care for my body and am afraid to be infected (by HIV), so I never reply to this kind of message. I went out to date several 0s from the site, but these guys just never took their wallets out when we were out for dinner or something. Just because I was the 1(top) and rich in their eyes doesn't mean I was supposed to pay for everything. To be honest, I am tired of the freaks all over the gay apps. You must be very lucky to find true love from these sites."

Rong's words demonstrated that one couldn't learn the other's sexual habit and financial capability from the profile photo and role term put on the app profile. While Rong's previous dates assumed Rong's role as 1 implied his sex role as top and his dominant economic role, Rong felt he was taken advantage of by these 0s. Rong explained later that he didn't like the 0s who constrained themselves through a stereotypically gendered 1-0 binary, believing that being a 0 meant being dependent and effeminate in various ways. He further commented that "those 0s were usually stupid and couldn't achieve anything". What he didn't explicitly point out was the importance of dating someone with a corresponding socio-economic status and lifestyle to him.

To conclude, the anonymity on the Internet was double-edged. Cyberspace not only satisfied the need for some non-heterosexual people to remain anonymous, but also complicated the matter of trust and behavioural norms for many others. When some non-heterosexual people felt like hiding their personal information as they looked for intimate relations, other non-heterosexual people felt the need to know more information especially about the other's cultural capital in order to develop a committed relationship. To put it another way, the emerging modes of online and stranger sociality have both enabled and constrained non-heterosexual people's practice of seeking loving relationships. Same-sex dating apps were scarcely considered a secure space in which one could find reliable and serious long-lasting relationships besides casual sex, as online interactions were often seen as revealing limited and even untrustworthy social cues about individuals.

Again, different generations of non-heterosexual people expressed inconsistent moral values with regards to online dating, namely, how visible and how frank one should be in order to develop a trusting intimate relationship. While many believed that exchanging photos, income status, and educational backgrounds were the entry point for turning virtual stranger encounters into a real-life romantic relationship, other people, especially older gay and lesbian and bisexual people with less negotiating power could make the opposite claim. Generationally, concerns around trust have increasingly shifted from exposing oneself in public to being taken advantage of emotionally and financially. In this sense, reliability and companionship were highlighted when seeking same-sex relationships. The practices of seeking same-sex lovers in emerging online space play a crucial role in understanding the concept of conjugal love. I now turn my attention to the practice of maintaining same-sex conjugal relationships.

Maintaining Love: Forming *Jiban* (Mutual Burden) Without the Marriage Certificate

In our interviews and daily conversations, my friend-respondents stressed the importance for a loving couple of sharing similar interests, values (*sanguan*) and life objectives. During an interview, a middle-aged gay couple said that "the key for two people to make a relationship durable is to desire the same lifestyle and life pattern". I was a junior queer woman merely in the early stage of a loving relationship in their eyes. I was still a student

who needed support from my parents, didn't know where to live in the future, and my girlfriend the same. In the couple's understanding of it, I was far from a stable relationship.

Before examining same-sex cohabitating relationships, a few words need to be said to re-address the shifting legal context and understanding of cohabitation as a non-marital intimate relationship in Chinese society in the last decades. During the socialist period, cohabitation outside marriage was regarded as an immoral and illegal practice. The Chinese Marriage Law of 1980 referred to cohabitation as 'illegal cohabitation,' while a 2001 amendment to the law changed the wording to 'non-marital cohabitation' (Yu & Xie 2015). The premarital cohabitation rates had increased from nearly absent before the 1980s to one-third in 2010-2012 (Xie 2013). On the other hand, the seemingly tolerant social attitude toward premarital cohabitation might be within the marriage territory, for heterosexual cohabitation in China was viewed as only a temporal and transitional status that led to marriage. Non-heterosexual cohabitating couples, according to the lawyers I talked with, could only be at a disadvantage. In a word, the Chinese state was "far from realizing equal citizen's rights on specific issues such as marriage, housing, and so on" (Zhang 2011:123). In a sharing session held by the LGBT non-profit organisation PFLAG China, the lawyer speaker, who introduced herself as a lesbian, concluded:

"Legally, our (queer couples) cohabitating relationships don't even qualify as *feifa tongju* (illegal cohabitation) even though we have to deal with the issues like joint ownership."

Against this background, the relatively well-off queer couples had employed several major strategies to make their relationship last a long time and were admired by other queer couples as 'solid as marriage'. I have borrowed the term *jiban*²³ (mutual burden) from many of my friend-informants to demonstrate their strategies for forming mutuality in various aspects of their lives. Buying housing property together was frequently mentioned in queer communities as one of the most desired strategies to secure a same-sex relationship since this could enable a couple to cohabitate independently and made them mutual owners of immovable property. Similar strategies included registering a

²³ *Jiban* literally means constrains and nets/strings/ropes that tie up horses and cattle, to become entangled in nets. This word didn't have a positive meaning. Some argue that it has become influenced by the Japanese word 'kizuna'. *Jiban* is frequently used to refer to an unbreakable bond between people nowadays.

company jointly and buying insurance for each other. The purpose of these strategies was to obtain mutual ownership or partnership recognised by existing private law.

An, who was 33 years old and had been with his partner Ye since 2008, gave a narrative that demonstrates the complexities of mutual property ownership, love, and feeling of security in a same-sex relationship:

“In 2010, Ye quit his job in a foreign trade company and joined my company. Ye’s parents are richer than mine. I am from Fuyang; his family is from Shenzhen. He suffered from depression and didn’t enjoy his former job, so I told him that he could quit. I bought apartments in Shenzhen for myself and for Ye as well. Ye felt insecure, so I bought several apartments in Shenzhen under his name. Also, our cooperative relationship is stated in the company policy. If something terrible happened to me, Ye would receive my capital.”

In our interview, An didn’t explain why Ye would feel insecure because he assumed that I, as a Chinese person, didn’t need such an explanation. Based on An’s narrative, Ye’s feelings of insecurity toward their relationship was due to his economic dependence and the lack of legal recognition of same-sex relationship, and An solved this by forming mutual partnership and ownership with Ye. They also have three sons together, which I shall discuss in Chapter 4.

Tommy, who was a 50-year-old gay who had been together with his partner Joe and their son Jack for more than 20 years, told me about the time that transformed their relationship:

“I worked so hard and bought an apartment in Guangzhou in December 1990 for us (Tommy, Joe and Jack) to live together. We have entered the family mode since then. Because Jack was so young, Joe has been staying at home as a ‘househusband’ (*jiatingzhufu*). I look after the outside, and Joe looks after the inside (*wo zhu wai, ta zhu nei*).”

Indeed, living together in an owned apartment symbolised stability and family for Tommy and Joe. In 2012, Tommy and Joe’s 15th anniversary, they signed a heritage claim notarised by their friends. In this claim, Tommy wrote that if anything happened to him, his godson Jack would inherit his property, and Joe, as Jack’s legal father, could handle his property. Tommy also bought insurance and changed the insurance beneficiary to Jack once the insurance becomes effective. He explained that insurance companies usually wouldn’t let the insurer choose people other than the legal spouse, children, and parents

to be beneficiary when buying the insurance. I will return to detail their family lives in the following chapters.

Xie and Hong, a lesbian couple living in Shenzhen with a son, told me:

“We have consulted the lawyer about securing our relationship as a same-sex couple, and the lawyer told us the law has no safeguard for us same-sex couples at all, so we’ve decided that we would buy properties and put our names on the properties one by one.”

Xie was 44 years old and Hong was 34 years old and their relationship started in 2009. Hong once said, “Xie puts her heart into our relationship.” To explain this, Hong told me that after Xie found out she liked the bread from a local bakery, Xie went to buy every kind of bread from the bakery and brought the bread to her workplace every day. Hong and Xie’s friends commented, “Isn’t Xie romantic?” More of their life histories will be detailed in later chapters.

The three same-sex couples mentioned above were all middle-aged and had few resources when they migrated to Shenzhen/Guangzhou. They, and other respondents who bought one or more houses in Shenzhen, highly appreciated the potential for upward mobility in this fast-developing city. Some extended their gratitude to the state for the economic opportunities they grasped during market reform. Moreover, An, Tommy, and Xie highlighted their love for their same-sex partners by linking their economic capital together under private law (property, contract, company law). They understood that forming mutual ownership was key to maintaining their loving relationship. Such narratives arguably embraced consumer culture since buying goods for the loved one was highly encouraged.

Due to the rising real estate prices, younger same-sex couples in Shenzhen and other first-tier cities generally couldn’t afford to buy an apartment unless their parents provided financial support. It is the case that parents in urban China nowadays must pay a lot more to purchase housing property for their children to secure their future. The house that parents bought for sons traditionally served the purpose of the matrimonial home, and such a practice was extended to the only daughter after the one-child policy was introduced. Legally and ethically speaking, non-heterosexual people couldn’t add the same-sex lover’s name to the property that their parents bought for them. The successful

cases of middle-aged same-sex couples who bought houses by themselves might be even rarer among young generations. Unlike the three queer couples mentioned above, most young non-heterosexual people didn't see themselves as successfully settled in Shenzhen because they lived in rented shared flats and thus couldn't envision a long-lasting relationship in the big city. Private house in post-reform China is bonded with notions of marriage, family, and middle-class lifestyle (Zhang 2008). An increasing number of same-sex couples born after 1990 showed an interest in learning the process of notarising their cohabitating relationship and testaments during my fieldwork, as it wouldn't require one to own a house or company to be eligible. Still, many young respondents displayed strong desires for "owning an apartment and living with a partner in our little world". I will now detail the cases of two same-sex couples that reveal the complex interconnections between economic, legal, and cultural domains in queer intimate lives.

Mo & Lin: "we are in a stable relationship."

Mo was born in 1989 in Chengdu. She was living in Shenzhen with her girlfriend, Lin, and two cats. They have been living together for two years when I started my fieldwork in 2018. Mo's main job was as a designer, and her girlfriend Lin's main job was in sales. Later in 2018, Mo and Lin took over an alcohol and tobacco store with Lin's colleague in a mall as a side occupation.

Mo received her master's degree in graphic design from an Italian university. She came back to China in 2013 and started working in Shenzhen. After a year, she tried to start her own company in Chengdu but failed in the early stages. Mo explained that she couldn't handle the complex social relationships in Chinese society. She came back to Shenzhen since there were few decent job opportunities for designers in Chengdu. Being the only child, Mo told me her parents almost spoiled her when she grew up. She came out to her parents when she was studying in Italy. Just like other lesbians from middle-class families I met in second/third-tier cities, Mo's parents had already bought an apartment for their only daughter in Chengdu. Mo's parents also came to Shenzhen occasionally to visit Mo.

Mo's girlfriend, Lin, obtained her education from junior high school. Lin was born in 1986 in a rural town in Anhui Province. Lin came to Shenzhen when she was 16 years old as a migrant worker. The mobilised economic market in Shenzhen allowed Lin to move from being a factory worker to a salesperson in a beverage company. When I saw

Mo and Lin for the first time, I could easily tell that Lin was a *ye T* as she had a masculine appearance style. Also, Lin had a lot of male and T ‘brothers (*xiongdi*)’ and social resources. Mo told me that Lin could be friends with business partners and got benefits from that. For example, Lin and her colleague had the opportunity to open the alcohol and tobacco store and secured the prime costs with the mall and supplier. All Mo did was to pay for the major costs, and Lin was responsible for the operation.

Mo’s salary was 15,000 RMB, and Lin’s salary depended on her sales commission. Mo paid for the rent of their two-bedroom apartments (4,000 RMB/ month), and Lin regularly bought household goods and food. I asked Mo whether their backgrounds and economic conditions have had any effect on their relationship, and she smiled

“Well, I knew we were different at the very first time we met. We started a chat on *ReLa* through its ‘Searching Other Users in the Vicinity’ feature. The app showed our physical distance was just a mile, so we decided to have a casual hang out. It turned out that we certainly lived in the same area, but I was living in an apartment, and she was living in a cheap *nongmin fang*²⁴. It didn’t bother me. She was the one dithering over our backgrounds. None of her ex-girlfriends earned more than she. We had been friends for half a year until we confirmed our affection for each other. We are complementary to each other in terms of personal characteristics.”

Based on Mo’s narrative, Lin had viewed her T role as a financial provider in an intimate relationship. On the other hand, Mo didn’t see herself as a P nor dependent even though she was attracted to T’s gender style. It took Mo and Lin months to mediate their different understanding of their roles in the relationship. For Mo, Lin had the social ability she lacked. Furthermore, Lin gave Mo the feeling of home. Since Lin’s working hours were flexible, she cooked for Mo every day. Even after they opened the alcohol and tobacco store, Lin would still prepare bento meals to take to the store during weekends. Ever since Lin moved to her apartment to live together, Mo always felt like going back home after work when she knew her girlfriend would welcome her with a warm meal.

I was shocked when I heard Lin was in a marriage with a straight man. When Lin reached 20, Lin’s family arranged a marriage between Lin and a man she never met. At that time,

²⁴ ‘*Nongmin*’ literally means farmer and ‘*fang*’ means room. *Nongmin fang* was used to describe the house built by locals for rent without legal permission. *Nongmin fang* was a budget option for rent.

Lin couldn't do anything except going back to her hometown and get married. The next year, Lin gave birth to a son. Lin thought she had fulfilled her duty and “no one can say anything anymore”. She left her husband and son in Anhui and went back to Shenzhen for work. Since then, Lin started dating women. In the last ten years, Lin only came back to her hometown once a year. Lin also sent money and toys back to her parents and her son. Mo didn't mind Lin's married status as she said, “anyway, she hasn't slept with that guy for years, and I understand her family background”. Mo warned me about using kin terms in front of Lin. Lin was angry at Mo when Mo referred ‘that guy’ as Lin's ‘husband’.

In 2018, Lin wanted to divorce. The man refused to divorce and told Lin that Lin must take their son with her if they got divorced. Although I never met the man who married Lin, I could tell that the man is unpopular from Mo's words. For a middle-aged divorced man staying in a village, it would be difficult to marry again, especially with a child. The man's parents clearly couldn't afford to arrange another marriage for their son again. Also, Mo refused to live with Lin's son. Eventually, the marriage didn't end and Lin's son stayed in Anhui with the grandparents. Both Lin and the man have their reasons to keep their marriage even though they barely knew each other and had no affective bonds. As a solution to this continuing marriage, Lin never kept any property under her name to avoid potential disputes. Since Mo owned an apartment in Chengdu, she and Lin planned to go back to Chengdu in a few years and start a company together.

The first time I met Mo and Lin, they introduced themselves with “we are in a stable (*wending*) relationship”. This statement gave me many assumptions about them that were toppled later. As I learned more and more details about their life experiences, I noticed the concept of a ‘stable relationship’ could be as elastic and as consolidated among my respondents' minds. When I posted a recruitment article saying I was looking for queer couples to participate in my research, my friends and a lot of other people who read my post asked: “I have a girlfriend/boyfriend now, but our relationship is not *wending* yet. Do I qualify to participate in your research?” Some of them didn't live with their lovers, some didn't come out to parents, and some didn't think they had the financial independence to “live like a married couple” (meaning making their own decisions without parental interference). On the other hand, Lin had arranged to disconnect herself from her legal ‘husband’ physically and financially.

What then shall a married couple be like? Lin's account has proven that even the living arrangements of heterosexual married couples might vary. Furthermore, Mo and Lin's detailed plan for their future was easily imaginable.

Zhao & Ma: "I wished to escape from a stable life."

I had an in-depth interview with Zhao and we encountered each other multiple times in formal and informal queer social gatherings. "I have been together with my partner since 2004" was the unchanged opening sentence every time Zhao introduced himself to other non-heterosexual people, and it always impressed everyone in the room.

Zhao was born in 1980 in Jiujiang, Jiangxi. He started teaching at an elementary school after graduating from teacher-training college. He had worked at the school for 13 years. He told me he was working at one of the best elementary schools in the Jiangxi Province. His position at public school is considered extremely *wending* (stable). Thus, Zhao's resignation was surprising for others:

"When I quit my job in 2012, my resignation was the only 'naked resignation (*luoci*, meaning quitting one's job without securing another job)' in the school's history! You know my position is quite stable and with all the retirement benefits. People worked hard to get the position and they wouldn't leave it so easily. They couldn't believe that I didn't have a better job lined up! But I didn't think that way. Imagine yourself sitting in an office with the same crew for decades until you retire! Too boring for me. In fact, I was ready to work in McDonald's in Guangzhou when I decided to leave that elementary school and leave Jiangxi."

Zhao felt his work routine in hometown was getting dull and found 'no hope' in his hometown. Zhao realised he liked men at a very early age. In his 20s, he started using online forums to meet other non-heterosexual men, who were often older than him and married. "I don't judge them, but I don't want to live a counterfeit life like this," Zhao said. He always desired life in Guangzhou where he could be himself openly. Zhao also joked that that is why he only makes friends with people from big cities.

Zhao met his boyfriend Ma in 2004 at an online Euro-American pop music forum. Ma was born and raised in Guangzhou and was 2 years younger than Zhao. They soon became web friends with similar music tastes. Subsequently, Zhao went on a business trip to Hong

Kong, and they had an opportunity to meet face-to-face in Guangzhou. Later, they spent a holiday in Zhao's hometown together and expressed their affection for each other:

“Ma asked me to be his ‘*xiongdì*’ (brother) to tighten our relationship. I replied that I didn’t want us to be brothers because I liked him; I wanted us to be lovers.”

Since then, they became boyfriends and started a long-distance relationship from 2004 to 2012. Zhao and Ma visited each other and stayed in their apartments for a few days whenever they are free. Zhao had vacations as a school teacher, and Ma worked at his family shop. Both of them were living with their parents during these years. After years of a long-distance relationship, Ma's mother sensed the relationship between her son and Zhao. One day, Zhao received a phone call from Ma's mother, who euphemistically pointed out that Zhao had come to Guangzhou to visit her son “too many times”. After the phone call, Zhao told Ma that he wouldn't come to Guangzhou anymore and wanted to break up with Ma. Shortly afterwards, Zhao learned that Ma was on the brink of collapse and came out to his mother. The next day, Zhao took the train to Guangzhou and had a 4-hour talk with Ma's mother. At the end of the talk, Ma's mother had nearly accepted their relationship.

After Ma came out to his parents, Zhao thought it was time for him to come out to his parents and live with Ma. His parents were working at a local textile factory. He thought his mother would accept the fact faster than his father, but his prediction was wrong:

“My mother is gentle, and my dad is strict. Somehow, I assumed that my dad was conservative. However, my mom cried hard for days, and my dad was the one comforting her. My mom even asked my dad, ‘Aren’t you sad that no grandchildren will sweep our graves in the future?’ My dad answered, ‘Our son’s generation already stopped sweeping graves every year. Even though we have grandchildren and so forth, it’s doubtful that they would sweep our graves. You cannot make the next generations your business’. My dad even called a meeting to tell his relatives not to worry about my marriage.”

Zhao's father also came to Guangzhou to visit Zhao and Ma's parents. During their first meeting, Zhao's father said to Ma's mother, “think like we have one more son. As long as they are happy, let them be”.

Ma's parents bought Ma an apartment in the same housing estate as Ma's matrimonial home before Ma came out. After learning that Ma was not going to marry a woman, Ma's

parents left the apartment to Ma and Zhao. Ma and Zhao insisted that Ma's parents move to the new larger apartment and they stayed at the older apartment. They have been living in the older apartment closely with Ma's parents since then. In 2019, Zhao bought a flat in Guangzhou.

Zhao still returned to Jiujiang to visit his parents every year during Spring Festivals, sometimes with Ma. Both being migrants in a first-tier city, we exchanged our views briefly:

Me: "How is your hometown right now?"

Zhao: "No change at all. If you open the *BlueD* app in Jiujiang, you see lots of blank profile pictures or fake photos. Those gay men are scared to show their actual face to others. Here (in Guangzhou), you see real faces when you use the app."

Me: "So, does Guangzhou meet your expectation of the big city?"

Zhao: "It's even better than my imagination! There are many more resources here."

Me: "I agree with you, but it has changed. My friends and I are suffering from the dramatic housing prices right now".

Zhao: "But I bet you will stay here. You all will. I know you can't go back to your hometown. You simply no longer share the same topic with people in your hometown."

It appeared that Zhao disliked the practices of social relations in his hometown. This conversation reflected many non-heterosexual migrants' conflicting attitudes towards living in big cities. Zhao acknowledged the fact that he and his partner were not worried about their elderly life as they were living a financially abundant life in Guangzhou. It could easily be observed that Zhao went to cafes regularly, regularly purchased decent kitchen appliances and kept a dog with Ma. Zhao's parents never let Zhao send them money. Zhao was aware that his parents didn't need his financial support. He told me that his parents went travelling every year and his mom had made many new friends. Zhao endorsed coming out in an ethical manner, linking it to filial piety:

"I remember that on a recent day, my mom suddenly blamed me for coming out to her too late. She said that I was heartless especially when I saw her knitting. Before knowing my sexual orientation, my mom believed I would marry and have children, so she spent significant time knitting kid's clothing and did much preparation for me. It turned out that her efforts were just pointless. She accused me of keeping my

secrets and wasting her time. She could have more spare time making friends if I came out to her earlier.”

Conclusion: Queer Love in a Chinese First-tier City

In conclusion, I have discussed the elastic use of 1/0/0.5/T/P/H- related slang in queer dating practices and how are these role terms perceived through comparison with heterosexual relationships and gender norms. Overall, the 1-0, T-P relationship modes have proliferated into a diverse range of relationship modes and role terms, especially among urban young queer couples. Meanwhile, 1-0 and T-P were often reduced to traditional heterosexual relationships in which the man was dominant and caring and the woman was submissive and dependent. This was based on the understanding that T-P and 1-0 modes were informed by traditional Chinese gender culture and created unequal relations between couples. The tendency to reduce female masculinity and male femininity to gender unconformity has further produced a hierarchy of same-sex relationships modes. Younger non-heterosexual people emphasised that same-sex relationships should be equal and inter-dependent in terms of emotional, sexual, and economic roles. On the other hand, my observation indicates that these role terms are rather *biaomian* (superficial) in queer relationships, and they might or might not be understood as gendered styles. Those who contended that modern same-sex relationships should be different from heterosexual relationships risked understating heterosexual relationships as an eternally static object for comparison. As researchers, it is vital to carefully examine non-heterosexual people's expressions of modern/traditional, masculine/feminine, same-sex/heterosexual binaries. The debate on “what a modern and authentic same-sex relationship should be” in queer communities is constantly being shaped by notions of modernity, lesbian/gay authenticity, and heterosexual relationships.

Non-heterosexual people's practices of seeking same-sex lovers have also changed dramatically, and emerging online dating sites have become an important cultural space for non-heterosexual people to locate potential dates who share similar cultural tastes, backgrounds, and social status. Yet, online dating with strangers symbolises risk and uncertainty, as my respondents expressed inconsistent moral standards and judgements regarding dating practices. Young queer urbanites frequently expressed their worries about being taken advantage of emotionally and financially. The rhetoric of morality, *suzhi* (quality), and taste/interests have played a central role in non-heterosexual people's

dating practices. Some non-heterosexual people have tended to conceal their personal details, such as marital status and income, when they look for same-sex dates, while other people consider them to be deciding factors. To understand the split in moral judgments, we must acknowledge that the ability to be completely honest and out in online and offline worlds remains a class-specific privilege for Chinese non-heterosexual people. In this sense, the practice of seeking lovers for non-heterosexual people is inseparable from class stratification. Overall, what my friend-respondents desired from romantic relationships in many ways looks like conjugal relations, characterised by reliability and companionship. The strategies adopted by queer couples to maintain their relationships further echoes with this meaning.

At this point, it is important to apprehend queer intimate relationship through the very idea of romantic and conjugal love in wider society. The conception of 'love' in Chinese society has never been fixed. Borrowing from Povinelli (2006), love is not a set of universally actual truths but, rather, a developing discourse. In Confucian China, marriage was arranged by family elders primarily for the purpose of having male offspring, exchanging resources, increasing manpower, and forming alliances. Marriage was viewed as a corporate relation between two families rather than an individual matter. Pan suggests that "while marriage was one of life's central experiences in China, the ideal of the primacy of love never was" (2015: 280). In other words, the basis of marriage was patrilineal lineage rather than affection or 'love'. The youth, especially young women, had little autonomy. It is necessary to recall Povinelli's argument and take the position that the idea of love cannot be taken for granted as an 'actual' event. There is a rich collection of poetry and folk songs about 'love' in Imperial China, which is neither related to sexual desire nor freedom in marriage²⁵. The ideology of 'romantic love' in China is constituted through the rejection of arranged marriage and is linked to the sense of modernity and individual autonomy (Yan 2003, Pan 2015). Since the 1920s, May Fourth progressives have promoted 'romantic/free love' as a symbol of freedom, autonomy, and equality against Confucian values (Lee 2006). Arranged marriage, once a social norm, has become a symbol of backwardness. The idea of true love "became so under Western influence," and "new foreign ideas on the nature of love not only entered the Chinese conception but became constitutive of it" (Pan 2015:7). The emerging discourses on

²⁵ Some argue that 'love' poetry in imperial China is often a political metaphor.

‘romantic love’, ‘true love’, and ‘free love’ in 20th century China symbolises the contradictions between tradition and modernity. Pan and Lee’s literature again contribute to the denaturalisation of love in Chinese society.

Mo and Zhao’s narratives of their love stories and coming-out experience cannot be articulated alone without acknowledging their family backgrounds, career paths, and migrating experiences to the ‘big cities’ in Guangdong, China. Mo and Zhao emphasised their similar cultural tastes and complementary personal characteristics as the main factor they fell for their same-sex partners. In other words, they perceive and describe their relationships as soulmates instead of erotic lovers or a couple ‘matched for marriage’ (*mendanghudui*). When Zhao compared lives in his hometown and Guangzhou, his description of same-sex dating practices in the two places resonated with queer urban utopian imaginaries countering normative lifestyles (Huang 2017). Zhao couldn’t stand *wending* (stable) life in his hometown, especially after realising the gay men in his hometown were likely to enter heterosexual marriage and heteronormative lifestyles. The urban atmosphere of Guangzhou allowed Zhao to grasp his queer affective needs and pursue romantic relationships.

Yet this doesn’t mean my friend-informants’ loving relationships are ‘socially exfoliating’; rather, they have constantly negotiated with economic, cultural, and legal factors that constrained their life status and intimate relationships. For instance, Mo and Lin are concerned with possible financial disputes with Lin’s legal husband. Likewise, Zhao and Ma address their parents’ worries for their childless future life. Big cities became sites for them to gain upward mobility and material recourses, keep a manageable distance from their families of origin in their hometowns and escape from marriage pressure. Most importantly, they attempt to find ways to secure their cohabiting relationship like the middle-aged queer couples mentioned in this chapter. Without the housing properties bought by parents which ensured their stable life status, they would need to find alternative ways to form mutuality and maintain their relationships. In this sense, queer subjects’ practices of seeking and maintaining their loving relationships encompass the blurred discourses on romantic/free love and conjugal/companionate love, and their expression of intimate love is beyond the tradition-modernity binary. Having children together was another key strategy queer couples used to secure their loving relationship, which I will elucidate in more details in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Desiring Children

This chapter deals with reproduction and parenthood in relations to the conceptions of blood ties and social policies in Chinese queer life-worlds. In this chapter, I explore how non-heterosexual people of different age groups and backgrounds understood having offspring in the contexts of filial duty and care for the elderly in a southern Chinese first-tier city. When and why do Chinese non-heterosexual people want children? How do Chinese non-heterosexual people cope with the existing family-planning policy? What are the desirable tactics for non-heterosexual people to have children? To unpack this topic, I investigate decision-making processes that moved queer individuals or couples towards parenthood and those who chose not to pursue parenthood. I will document the existing practices for Chinese non-heterosexual people around having children and the moral and legal issues raised by these practices. This is followed by an elucidation of which practices were believed to be better in queer communities and how queer parents made their decisions to have children accordingly. The life stories and narratives of single queer parents and queer couples having children stress their understanding of blood ties and children's symbolic position in forming stable relationships and reproductive futures that would be approved by their parents and the state. Also, I elaborate here on how queer parents' demonstrations of love for their children links to materiality.

Moving to Parenthood

“You and your same-sex partner need to share a common bond for your relationship, and a child is the best bond!”

This argument was held by a middle-aged representative speaker of a private assisted reproductive technologies (ART) agency specialising at an LGBT-themed talkfest. The speaker then used his own experience as a gay father to validate his argument. The speaker summarised that having a baby with his boyfriend was beneficial for their relationship. His speech received a mixed response, as some young attendees murmured about the high cost of using ART and some joked, “first we need a partner to do it together”.

As the recent survey by the United Nations Development Programme (2016) indicates, nearly two-thirds of LGBT respondents felt under great pressure from their families to

enter heterosexual marriages and have children. The survey results are revealing, while it would be abridging for researchers to understand Chinese LGBT people' motivation for having children exclusively in the context of family pressure. Therefore, I investigate why and when my respondents have children without assuming their motivations.

Some respondents highlighted that they had always wanted to be a parent. An, a gay father of three sons, said, "since I was young, I knew I wanted children and I had made plans. I planned to have mixed-race babies." Many lesbian respondents stressed that they loved children very much and desired their company in their life. One of my lesbian friends said, "raising a child will give me the feeling of accomplishment". In this kind of description, queer wannabe parents didn't mention their parents' expectations, but rather concentrating on their own desires. A few queer (wannabe) parents mentioned that they would want children to support them in their elderly life, while they also stressed that it was not the key factor for them to have children.

Like the speaker mentioned at the beginning of this section, many queer parents described children as the most effective mutual bond between a couple. Tommy, a 50-year-old gay man who has been with his partner Joe for more than 20 years, once said, "Honestly, I don't know if I would still be with Joe without our son Jack." According to Tommy, it was the moment that they brought the little Jack to his flat in Guangzhou when he felt at home. He emphasised that having a mutual life goal was what made a relationship long-lasting. For Tommy and Joe, raising their son Jack is their mutual goal.

Same-sex couples in this ethnography also described parenting as entering a more intimate and promising stage of their relationship. Pam, a 28-year-old lesbian friend-respondent, explained the reason for her and her partner, Danny, to have their child through *A luan* (egg) *B huai* (pregnancy), meaning Pam was going to give birth to the child using Danny's egg:

"We have been enjoying time together. Naturally, we want our connection to be tighter. I can't think of anything else to bond us more tightly."

Sitting with Pam, Danny added:

"It is important to have a mutual *jiban* (burden, liability) to make a relationship last. You must plan a future together, otherwise it's just a repetition of eating and sleeping without the sense of a future life. When I was with my ex-girlfriend, she didn't have

any clue about our future. I asked her whether she wanted to immigrate to foreign countries or stay in China and whether she wanted to marry me or have children; she just didn't know. I felt so insecure back then."

Likewise, having children was frequently suggested as a strategy that increased the cost of separation (*fenshou chengben*), as a lesbian mother illustrated:

"When you have children together, your girlfriend can't just take the luggage and leave the house when you have a fight. You won't break up easily. She becomes the mother of your kid! It will be like an actual marriage." (Yazi, age 32)

It must be noted that the child as a mutual bond/burden (*jiban*) between a same-sex couple only worked in certain situations. In other circumstances, it worked the opposite way. I will illustrate this with further individual accounts later in this chapter and chapter 6.

Parental expectations continued to be an important factor for some respondents in having children, though they emphasised that their parents did not compel them; rather, they wanted their parents to be happy and satisfied. When I firstly met Zhenzhen, who was 24 years old, she was already preparing for IVF treatment. I was surprised and said, "you are so young to have children!" Zhenzhen said,

"I agree with you, but my womb is not in good condition. My body can't wait. Besides, my parents are paying for all the IVF expenses. They are bored of their life in the small town, you know, they need a kid."

Zhenzhen has come out to her parents, while her parents neither accepted her relationship with Fei nor objected to it. Zhenzhen and her 23-year-old girlfriend Fei were living in a flat purchased by Zhenzhen's parents. Zhenzhen's parents didn't ask Zhenzhen to marry a man but instead asked her to have offspring after she was diagnosed with premature ovarian failure. Zhenzhen thought that, after her child was born, she could leave her child with her parents and continue to pursue her career. For Zhenzhen, having children was a win-win move.

Zhenzhen's situation was by no means unique. Zhenzhen and another middle-aged respondent clarified that they voluntarily chose to have children for their parents' good. Especially for those who were the only child, not having offspring usually meant the discontinuity of the family line. Having offspring had always been a vital topic in

premodern China which was invested with the patrilineal order of tracing ancestors and the Confucian philosophy of family relations (Yang 1957, Walker 1996, Xie 2013). One characteristic of the traditional Chinese kinship system was the patrilineal continuity that traces the family lineage through men, linking men with both their male ancestors (*zuxian*) and descendants (*houdai*). It was believed that ancestors without male descendants to offer tributes would be hungry ghosts wandering in the living world. Thus, the living men were obligated to worship and offer tributes such as *mingbi* (nether money) to their ancestors. In this context, family is a closed and unitary group consisting of living and deceased men sharing the same origin and surname. Yang has suggested the function of ancestor worship is “to cultivate kinship values like filial piety, family loyalty, and continuity of the family lineage (1957:278)”. Confucianism has been regarded as the most influential ideology in China for over two millennia. Filial duty (*xiao*), as the moral standard in Confucian ideology, focuses on the continuation of the family line and the support, subordination and obedience to the elders (Ikels 2004). Once more, the Confucian conception of filial duty stressed the importance of *chuanzongjiedai* (carry on the family line) and strengthened parental authority. Borrowing the discourse on Confucian familism and ancestor worship, many non-heterosexual people held the opinion that not fulfilling one’s family responsibility was a selfish thing to do. Commonly, I was told that, after children were born, they would have fulfilled family expectations and could then do all the things they wanted, including dating same-sex lovers. Similarly, heterosexual marriages for queer women were phrased as not merely family pressure but a tactic for leaving families of origin to gain personal autonomy (Kam 2013, Engebretsen 2014). Having children, in Zhenzhen’s narrative, became a moral accomplishment and a path to individual freedom.

Chen, the manager of a private assisted reproductive technologies (ART) agency, said she could tell if it was the clients themselves who wanted to be parents or the clients’ parents who wanted to be grandparents. Contrary to Zhenzhen, Chen argued that fulfilling parental expectations through heterosexual marriage and having children was an act of cowardice and selfishness:

“Usually, if the clients’ parents talk to us and pay for all the fees, I know the parents want a grandchild. These clients are irresponsible, like big kids, because they don’t have their own motivation to be parents. They are just doing what their parents want so they can be free of family pressure. These kinds of clients probably leave the baby

to their parents for babysitting after the child is born and continue to play around. I think it is not fair to the child coming to the world since the parent doesn't desire it." Chen felt that, in this context, the expected baby was merely a tool for the client to escape family pressure. To put it another way, Chen didn't think people who had children for fulfilling parental expectations would be responsible parents themselves. Chen's opinion has become prevalent in online social media platforms like *Douban* and *Weibo*, which young users dominate.

In short, non-heterosexual people's drive for having children cannot be reduced to family pressure. They can also desire parenting as a lifestyle. Fulfilling parental expectations through entering marriages and having offspring is no longer the dominant factor in understanding one's moral worth, as Zhenzhen's account increasingly encounters criticism from other non-heterosexual people in Chinese cities. On the other hand, non-heterosexual people's motivations for having children are often unconsolidated and represented in both an individualistic sense as self-desire and relational rhetoric as a conjugal technique. There is a generational tendency to present the desire for parenthood as an individualistic and voluntary choice free from traditional family pressure. Moreover, the changing pattern of parent-child relations in urban China has shaped young non-heterosexual people's willingness to raise children, which I shall unpack in the next section.

"Having Children Is Not Worth It"

I never discussed parenting with my peers before I began this research. Some of them didn't like the idea of having children at all. Claire, a 27-year-old lesbian who was working as a financial consultant in Shenzhen, said:

"Getting married and having children is not a reliable option anymore. Nowadays, you must spend all your money on your children – buying imported milk powder, paying for school and tutorial lessons, supporting them financially for years after graduation - and they might not grow up as you hope. It is gambling. I'd rather save all these expenses for raising a child and go to a nice nursing home when I get old".

Without mentioning the legal constraints of same-sex parenting or whether they liked kids or not, my peers concluded that they couldn't afford to parent and it was not a reliable

investment for their future life. Raising a child in China, especially in first-tier cities, had increasingly become expensive and difficult, demonstrated by the continually falling fertility rate²⁶. Claire told me she calculated how much parents need to spend on housing, healthcare and education, and parenting for her was simply not worth it.

Parenting was often framed as exclusively for financially capable people. Same-sex couples considering becoming parents as a long-term goal usually complained that they had to earn a crazy amount of money to have children. For instance, they listed the prerequisites for childrearing, such as owning a school district apartment (*xuequ fang*)²⁷, which was unthinkable for those who had just worked for a few years. According to the Statistics Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality, the average annual income of 2018 in Shenzhen was 110,304 RMB for people working at non-private enterprises and 63,635 RMB for people working at private enterprises. In the meantime, the Shenzhen Real Estate Information Platform showed the average transaction price for housing property in 2018 was around 54,000 RMB per square meter²⁸. The average housing price of a central and school district apartment was noticeably higher, usually exceeding 100,000 RMB per square metre. I frequently saw the following statement on online forums,

“If I didn’t eat and didn’t consume anything for a year, I might be able to afford to buy 1 square metre in Shenzhen. If I want to buy a flat by myself, I need to work for several decades without consuming anything. Do the math and think about it.”

Most respondents believed that, in order to raise a child, one had to own a property. For many Chinese people, raising a child in a rented flat often implied instability and risk. Therefore, they had no choice but to postpone their plans to have children, just like many straight married couples. As mentioned earlier, young people preferred to settle in big cities, and therefore they had to deal with the high housing prices. In Shenzhen, I heard many young people in their late 20s saying, “it is too early for me to think about having children”. The overall trend of postponing childbirth among young Chinese urbanites also

²⁶ In 2018, the official birth rate in China fell to 12%, which was the lowest since 1949.

²⁷ It can also be translated as ‘elite school properties’, meaning a home inside a good school district. Because the ‘nearby school’ educational policy enabled the child living in school district to be enrolled in that school, the housing price near elite school was raised to sky-high.

²⁸ Since 2019, the Shenzhen Real Estate Information Platform stopped providing official data of average transaction price for housing property.

provided young non-heterosexual people with a convincing excuse to tell their parents whenever they were asked about their plans for having children.

Other than the rising expense of having children, Claire's statement further implied changes around the idea of filial piety and elderly support. Various studies show that Chinese society has been experiencing rapid transformations in family structures and consumer culture (Ying 2003, Fong 2004, Li 2011, Lin 2019). During the Mao era (1949-1976), parental authority had been weakened by the state (Yan 2003, Cohen 2005). Cohen (2005) points out that the de-collectivisation of interests caused rural families to lose much of their economic autonomy, while family (*jia*) remained an essential social unit. Women's social and economic status has significantly improved since 1949, shown in the rapidly growing percentages of women receiving postsecondary education (Xie 2013). The traditional disadvantaged positions, women and youth, have gained increased individual mobility. Li (2011) has noticed the trend toward nuclear families in urban cities illustrated by an increasing percentage of young married couples living apart from their parents. Filial piety remains as an essential moral practice, while we must not forget the actual practice of it is "situationally dependent and shaped by local circumstances of history, economics, social organization, and demography and by personal circumstances of wealth, gender, and family configuration" (Ikels 2004:2).

Since the one-child policy was introduced in 1979, reproduction has been strictly regulated and tied to legal marriage by the state. Children's education became an imperative type of family investment and expression of parental affection (Lin 2019). Children's consumption has increased dramatically; at the same time, children bear their parents' hopes for financial support and class mobility (Fong 2004). Although there has been a trend towards the nuclear family, a high percentage of elders co-residing/living closely with their children is still remarkable in urban China (Li 2011, Tang & Chen 2012, Xie 2013). Xie provides two explanations for the high percentage of elders co-residing with their children - the patrilocal tradition and the lack of public support (2013:7). Moreover, the one-child policy has placed familial pressure solely on the only child, who is expected to excel in school, have a decent job, get married, continue the family line, and take the primary responsibility for supporting the family elders. The current generation of non-heterosexual people born from the 1980s to 2010s under the one-child

policy is often only children who have no siblings to share the burden of care for their parents (Hildebrandt 2018).

Since elderly care was strongly dependent on kinship norms under the existing Chinese welfare system, not having children could represent a profound concern for one's future life. On the other hand, an increasing number of young urbanites like Claire didn't have faith in the Chinese common saying "raise children for the purpose of being looked after in old age (*yang'erfanglao*)". Relying on the notion of filial piety for one's care when elderly sounded unrealistic for them, as they have witnessed numerous urban Chinese parents spending all their life savings to buy apartments for children which their children could never repay. In this context, the parent-child relation looked like the parents giving their resources out without receiving them back.

Perhaps another reason for her feelings was that Claire didn't believe she successfully fulfilled her parents' expectations as an obedient daughter. When Claire came out to her mother, the latter ignored her. Claire rarely returned to her hometown in Yunnan Province. Whenever she talked with her parents through WeChat, they quarrelled about her life choices and her 'failure' in Shenzhen. As a *haigui* (overseas returnee) who spent years studying in Europe and returned to Shenzhen to work, Claire was anxious about returning her parents' investment in her education. After 3 years working in Shenzhen, her monthly salary had not exceeded 10,000 RMB. Living in the central district of Futian, half of her salary was spent on rent. Claire's primary goal was to use her own money to purchase an apartment for herself in Shenzhen, yet this goal sounded like daydreaming. When we walked by residential areas in Nanshan and Futian districts in Shenzhen, Claire often used her cell phone to check the housing prices. All her dream apartments were priced over 100,000 RMB per square metre, which made her dissatisfied with her current earnings. She also mentioned that, if her parents ever tried to understand her and respect her, their relationship would be better and her parents might support her to pay the down payment on an apartment in Shenzhen. Claire's argument resonated with Li (2011)'s research on urban young Chinese families, which suggests that the urban youth understand filial piety as 'mutual respect' and 'equal relations' rather than 'obedience'.

When Claire complained that her parents were responsible for their tense relationship, she repeatedly said, "we should be more selfish and care for ourselves rather than listening

to our parents”. Conceptualising caring for one’s own needs as opposite to parental authority, Claire made it clear that she didn’t intend to be a model daughter in her parents’ eyes. Not only did she think she could not afford childrearing, she did not envision offspring as reliable support for parents’ elderly life. Neither buying a house and education for her children nor showing filial love to her parents was unconditional for Claire, as she employed the rhetoric of financial investment and payback to think about parent-child relations.

Furthering the discourse on filial duty, many respondents in their twenties criticised the notion of seeing the continuation of the family line as one’s moral responsibility. They frequently quoted a widespread statement from the Internet:

“Why is having offspring so important for some people? Must they have an inheritor to receive their throne or something?”

By questioning the importance of continuing the family line, these young urbanites created a distinction between modern and traditional values regarding having children. In this sense, only a person with outdated values would place importance on the family line (*chuanzongjiedai*) and blame others for not having children. This prevailing statement on online forums suggests young urbanites’ tendency to disconnect the purpose for entering marriage and having children from the notions of family line and filial piety.

While many young non-heterosexual people didn’t see parenting as an economically rewarding option and didn’t expect the coming generation of children to be fully obedient to their parents, some of my respondents who were planning to or already had children also used a similar logic to validate their motivation for being parents. By stressing that they wanted no material return from their children, they described their motivation as pure and modern. Not a single queer parent in my research acknowledged continuing the family line or supporting their elderly life as their key motivation for being parents, even though these were often assumed to be the major reasons for having offspring in China.

The personal stories from non-heterosexual people not wanting children suggested the symbolic feature of children as resources of elder support was shaken under the changing notion of parent-child relations. Still, not having children implied the need to have at least an alternative solution for elderly care and maintaining loving relationships. Claire hoped to earn enough money to support herself after retirement, as she spent most of her energy

on excelling at work. When Zhao told me that he didn't intend to have children, he added that he and his partner Ma were not worried about their elderly life as they were economically well-off. Zhao's parents were also living decently and never let Zhao send them money. Zhao and his boyfriend Ma kept a dog together, whom they referred to as their child.

The Vanishing and Emerging Practices: The Best Way to Have Children

As mentioned in the methodology, my research includes a diverse group of queer parents, including but not limited to single and divorced queer parents, same-sex couples who use assisted reproductive technologies (ART) to have children, and gay-lesbian *xinghun* co-parents. Although the pathways to parenthood almost always implied moral judgment for my friend-respondents, I don't intend to make rigid classifications of Chinese queer parents, nor do I intend to rank the moral worth of these practices. Rather, by exploring how Chinese non-heterosexual people made choices in having children, I articulate a dynamic understanding of kinship and moral landscape in recent years. Undeniably, there is more than one way to become a parent for Chinese non-heterosexual people, but they may not be recognised equally in the contexts of feasibility and morality.

Zhihun (marrying a straight person)

It was very easy to tell Xie was a *ye*(manly) T from her appearance and behaviour. Xie was born in 1975. Xie's same-sex partner, Hong, identified as a P and was eleven years younger than Xie. They were both from Hunan Province and later became Shenzhen citizens. We became familiar with each other as *laoxiang* (people from the same town). Many non-heterosexual people saw them as a model couple as they have been together for nearly 10 years and recently had a baby son, called Doudou. After having two dinners together, I learned about Xie's previous heterosexual marriage with a straight man and her older son who was already an adult. Not long after Xie graduated from junior high school, she was pressured by her father to get married and gave birth to a son in her early 20s. After that, she came out to her parents and divorced her former husband. Xie let her former husband take custody, which further irritated her father. Disappointed by her family of origin, Xie left home and started her business step by step. Xie's parents couldn't accept her life choices and refused to talk to her since she left. Similar to some other middle-aged gay men and lesbians I have met, Xie had a 'normative past' in

hometown and a ‘queer present’ in Shenzhen. There was no way for me to tell their former kin relations if they didn’t mention it.

Several respondents over 40 years old explained that they didn’t even realise their same-sex desires when they got married. In Chinese queer communities, *zhihun* (*zhi* literally means straight and *hun* means marriage) is a commonly used slang term to describe non-heterosexual people marrying straight people. Joe got married in 1996 when he was 22 years old. Growing up in a rural area, Joe went to work at a factory in Guangdong Province after he finished junior high school. In 1996, Joe’s relatives introduced him to a woman from his hometown. After the wedding, Joe came back to the factory and his wife stayed in hometown. While being married, Joe was confused about his desire for men. After he read a journal article on LGBT issues, he was eager to talk to the author, Tommy. Tommy and Joe exchanged emails in the following months and they met in person in the winter of 1997. They both realised they liked each other, and Joe told Tommy everything about his family, including his pregnant wife in his hometown. The day after their meeting, Joe came back to his hometown and told his wife he liked men. Joe’s wife was calm and they “divorced in peace”. According to Joe, there was no romantic love between Joe and his ex-wife since their marriage was close to being an arranged marriage and they rarely spent any time with each other. After that, Joe’s ex-wife gave birth to Jack. Tommy and Joe took Jack to Guangzhou when Jack was 2 years old and the three of them started living together.

During interviews and daily conversations, gay fathers and lesbian mothers often described their choice to enter conventional heterosexual marriage as the only way they could fulfil their parents’ expectations. Non-heterosexual people born around the 1970s and 1980s considered heterosexual marriage a family obligation that must be fulfilled. It was further clarified that staying in a heterosexual marriage was not the final solution to their parents’ expectation; having offspring (sons, in some cases) was their parents’ ultimate hope. We mustn’t forget that both marriage and reproduction were central life experiences in Confucianist China. Some middle-aged queer parents who entered a normative life pattern expressed mixed and even painful feelings. Mellow, a 43-year-old lesbian mother, had two ex-girlfriends before she intentionally married her male friend:

“I was 30 years old when I left the factory to open a flower shop. My ex-girlfriend generously supported me. However, the shop turned out to be a failure and I lost all

our savings. My parents didn't push me to marry, but I knew they were worried about my situation. Back in the early 2000s there was no advanced technology like IVF. Even if there was IVF, I didn't know if I could afford it. At that time, I made a terrible choice. I asked my best male friend from the factory to marry me, and we got married. My family was happy, but my ex-girlfriend was suffering and so was I. After two months, I found out I was pregnant. I couldn't pretend it anymore, so I came out to him and asked for a divorce. He didn't agree, and we went to court. The next year, we reached divorce by agreement. I felt very guilty and therefore didn't take any of his money. After I gave birth to a son, he wanted to take my son from me, and I eventually gave up the custody. Until my son turned 5 years old, he got married again and we (Mellow and her current girlfriend) took our son back to live with us."

Countless debates were elevated regarding this practice in recent years. While a same-sex desiring person might claim that they got married without realising their sexual orientation one or two decades ago, this kind of explanation would not be accepted anymore. Non-heterosexual people born after the late 1980s had the opportunity to learn of the terms such as '*tongxinglian*', '*tongzhi*', '*lala*', 'gay' and 'lesbian' on the Internet. Therefore, it was becoming rare that one could enter a conventional heterosexual marriage before realising one's same-sex desires. Furthermore, emerging practices to deal with parental expectation such as *xinghun*/contract marriage have gradually made a young non-heterosexual individual sound unconvincing when they claimed they had no other choice. Mellow's practice to intentionally marry a straight man to have children was termed as *pianhun* (lying about one's same-sex desires to marry a straight person) in online discussions. The word '*pian* (lie)' signified that it was fundamentally an immoral practice. Almost all respondents made it clear that they wouldn't develop friendship and intimate relationships with someone who *pianhun* nowadays, as a lesbian reasoned:

"People who *pianhun* nowadays are either coward or selfish. I don't believe they have no other choice. Why must they listen to their parents? Why must they marry an innocent person to have offspring? They not only lie to their parents, they hurt their straight spouse and eventually hurt our community!" (Saisai, age 29)

Pianhun was even more pronounced with the emerging issue of *tongqi* (literally meaning the wife of a homosexual man). At a PFLAG event in 2018, a guest speaker, Weichen,

gave a speech about her experience as a *tongqi*. Weichen said she was shocked when she found out about her ex-husband's affairs with men as she thought homosexual people wouldn't enter a heterosexual marriage. There are roughly 10 million straight women married to closeted gay men in China (Li et al. 2017). According to Weichen, her ex-husband not only lied about his sexual desires to marry Weichen, but also borrowed a large amount of money without telling her. As a legally married couple, Weichen was responsible for paying her husband's debts. Consequently, Weichen had to go to court with her ex-husband to solve the financial dispute. According to numerous online discussions, *tongqi* women have been lied to and taken advantage of by their gay husbands in various ways, including "being used as a shield against discrimination and a free surrogate mother for the gay husband". Many *tongqi* experienced physical and emotional domestic violence and lost custody of their children when they asked for divorce. Despite *tongfu* (husbands of homosexual women) being much less visible on mass media, Mellow's narrative proves that queer women are also involved in the practice of *pianhun*. Still, *tongqi* face much worse gender discrimination and sexual health problems.

It should be noted that Xie, Joe, and Mellow are older than the majority of the respondents in this research. Moreover, they chose to come out to their ex-spouses and parents at some point in their lives, while many other middle-aged non-heterosexual people remained closeted and married in a heteronormative family unit. Relationships with children from *zhihun* marriages, former marriage spouses and same-sex partners varied. Xie stressed that her older son, who was already studying at university, visited Xie and Hong frequently. "Gege (the older brother) accepts us quite well. I am even unhappy about the fact that *gege* is always on Hong's side!" Xie joked. Xie did a good job of balancing her multiple kinship roles as a mother to her older son and as a partner to her girlfriend. Xie was not a caring daughter in her relatives' eyes, while she didn't think her father deserved her care as well. Tommy and Joe maintained regular contact with Joe's ex-wife, who later moved to Guangzhou as well. Tommy called Joe's ex-wife 'Jack's Mama' and regularly posted photos of Jack's Mama with them at their home. On the other hand, Lin (previously mentioned in Chapter 3) had rather divisive relationships with her separated husband, her son, and her girlfriend Mo, since she couldn't bring her school-aged son to Shenzhen to live with her and Mo.

It became apparent that being able to maintain harmonious relationships with one's former spouse, children, and current same-sex lover would make one sound more responsible and honest and less like *pianhun*. In most circumstances, *zhihun* could be a neutral term, while *pianhun* was always negative in moral discourse. Tommy and Joe shared their story with thousands of blog readers because they believed that Joe's previous heterosexual marriage was unlike *pianhun*. Xie and Lin didn't tell me a lot about their relationships with ex-husbands while they implied that their ex-husbands didn't marry them for love, so both parties were married with a purpose. In this sense, *pianhun* came into existence when someone not only lied about sexual desires and practices, but also pretended to fall in love with a straight person. Xie and Lin further emphasised that they visited their children as much as they could. Mellow was aware of the criticisms about *pianhun*. When sharing her experience, Mellow repeated several times that she felt guilty and she didn't take advantage of her ex-husband to smooth the moral conflict. They also highlighted that they were honest with their same-sex partners. It would be accurate to suggest that *pianhun* was a vanishing practice among younger generations in big cities like Shenzhen due to the transforming attitudes towards entering heterosexual marriages and having children in queer communities.

Gay-lesbian *Xinghun* (contract marriage)

I met Ei and her best friend Ju in 2015 in Chengdu when I was doing my Master's fieldwork. After that, we regularly chatted via WeChat. Ei was born in 1982 and always saw herself as a T. When we met again in 2019, Ei was single and was a divorced mother of twins. Ei has worked in many major cities including Tianjin, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen before moving back to Chengdu to be self-employed. She bought an apartment by herself and has been enjoying Chengdu's relaxed atmosphere. Her social circles were full of non-heterosexual people and almost all her friends were in *xinghun* (contract marriages). *Xinghun*, short for *xingshi hunyin*, is also translated as nominal marriage, performative marriage, quasi-marriage, or a marriage of convenience between a gay man and a lesbian.

Ei married a gay man who was working in the army in 2012. They met each other through a *xinghun*-themed QQ group chat. At that time, like other non-heterosexual people when they reached 30 years old, Ei's parents expected her to marry and Ei chose *xinghun* to ease the pressure. I asked if her *xinghun* partner offered the apartment as bride-price, she

laughed and said “my mother didn’t ask for that. She was so happy that someone wanted to marry her old daughter!” Later, Ei made a difference between the ‘just like real family’ type of *xinghun* and the ‘business/nominal’ type of *xinghun*. According to Ei, her *xinghun* was more like the ‘nominal’ kind because there was no real exchange of bride-price and dowry, and they didn’t live together.

They were a lot of local *xinghun*-themed groups and some of them charged a membership fee. The group leaders were like matchmakers who would check every member’s social background and parenting plans and organise match meetings for members accordingly. Ei and her friends mentioned that these groups were popular as “they are safe and convenient”. Lesbian/gay bars in Chinese cities occasionally hosted *xinghun*-themed parties. Generally, the lesbian and the gay man would negotiate over how to pay betrothal gifts, how to behave in front of each other’s parents, whether to get a marriage certificate and have children, and so on. They might have a written *xinghun* contract which confirmed further details such as property and living arrangements, the length of the marriage, and parenting costs. Yet, they knew that such informal contracts had no legal force and they could only count on each other’s moral accountability. Even if both parties in a *xinghun* marriage signed a contract agreeing to not provide care for each other and to not share fostering rights, the agreements were legally invalid once they obtained a marriage certificate. In other words, non-heterosexual people in *xinghun* couldn’t make a legally enforcing contract regarding personal issues including custody rights when such terms were against Chinese marriage law. *Xinghun* couples who chose to obtain marriage certificates in recent years preferred to sign a prenuptial property agreement and get it notarised, as they learned that the property agreement was the only legally valid contract in the case of *xinghun* marriage.

For many non-heterosexual people desiring children, entering *xinghun* marriage was a necessary step towards being parents. Based on China’s planned birth policy, it was illegitimate to have out-of-wedlock children. Having children with the *xinghun* partner meant that one needed to be even more choosy, since the *xinghun* partner would be the other biological parent and they might remain married for an extended period. Further to the process of selection, a ‘suitable’ and desirable *xinghun* partner for a socially recognised normative marriage were that they be gender-conforming and hold a cosmopolitan middle-class status (Engebretsen 2017). My friend-respondents often joked

that finding an ideal *xinghun* partner was even harder than finding a good same-sex lover. Furthermore, Ei's case suggested that financial capability sometimes was not the major reason non-heterosexual people chose to have children through *xinghun*. Assisted reproductive technologies such as IUI (intrauterine insemination) and IVF (in-vitro fertilization) in China were only available to married couples. Otherwise, unmarried people had to go overseas or choose private medical institutions in mainland China which were situated in legally grey areas. Several middle-class non-heterosexual people told me that they chose *xinghun* even though they could afford all the parenting costs. They were worried that if their children didn't grow up with a father and a mother, they would suffer discrimination at school and enjoy a less accomplished childhood.

Ei and her *xinghun* partner obtained a marriage certificate once they agreed to co-parent. Yet their plan to have children was postponed for several years until Ei broke up with her ex-girlfriend in 2015. Ei and her *xinghun* partner went to the hospital to do IUI in 2016. In 2017, she gave birth to a son and a daughter and started showing photos of her children on social media. Ei always complained it was too late for her to decide to be a mother:

“I was already 34 when I did IUI. When I was 7-month pregnant, it was already hard for me to turn around. One day, I was just stretching my arm to reach the bookshelf, my water suddenly broke and Ju drove me to hospital”.

When Ei was with her ex-girlfriend from 2009 to 2015, Ei had helped her ex-girlfriend to find a *xinghun* partner. After her ex-girlfriend gave birth to a son, Ei felt like an outsider to her ex-girlfriend's *xinghun* family. Ei couldn't see her ex-girlfriend, who stayed at home with her baby since childbirth, and this became a major cause for them to break up. According to Ei, her ex-girlfriend was too cowardly and dependent to make her own decision, which made her eventually like a 'real wife' to the *xinghun* husband. It was at this point that Ei determined she would have biological children instead of counting on lesbian co-motherhood.

I went over our chat history and found Ei's commentary on *xinghun* changed dramatically. When we met in 2015, Ei and Ju asserted that “*xinghun* is the most suitable tactic and perhaps the only tactic for Chinese sexual minorities now”. What they implied was that *xinghun* could be a pragmatic solution for them to fulfil parental expectations and to enjoy freedom to date same-sex lovers. In the next few years, I repeatedly heard this sentence from my friend-respondents planning or being in *xinghun*.

Soon after Ei's twins were born in 2017, she warned me:

“If you can raise your children by your own or with your girlfriend, don't find a *xinghun* partner! *Xinghun* brings too many troubles and who knows if the kid really needs a father!”

At that time, Ei regretted that she chose to have children with her *xinghun* husband. She complained that her *xinghun* partner was not economically well-off and was stingy with children. They also had an unpleasant argument when her *xinghun* partner proposed to take the children to the army with him. For Ei, co-parenting with her *xinghun* partner became unexpectedly problematic, and she wished she could raise children on her own even if it meant that she had to bear all the parenting costs and be recognised as a divorced single mother in public.

Since Ei bought a bigger apartment herself last year, she got divorced from her *xinghun* partner to avoid future property disputes (or we can say Ei used it as an excuse to get rid of the marriage certificate). Ei has been taking care of the newborn twins with her mum since the divorce. Her former legal husband had to stay in the army during weekdays and his parents were not healthy enough to take care of the children. Ei showed me the divorce agreement which indicated that she had full custody and her legal ex-husband needed to pay the stated alimony every month.

When we met in person in 2019, Ei didn't complain about anything. Instead, she mentioned that her *xinghun* partner came to her apartment every Saturday. Since her *xinghun* partner didn't want to sleep at her home, he usually arrived before 8 am and left when the children fell asleep:

“My friends all told me I am lucky because not every father is willing to see his kid every weekend. My *xinghun* partner is a quiet person who doesn't like to play around with other gay men. He'd rather come to see his kids.”

Ei's co-parenting experience with her *xinghun* partner reveals the complex interplay of legal policies, economic considerations, and moral values. Although Ei said her *xinghun* was rather 'nominal' as she made effort to avoid possible property disputes, she still had moral expectations of her *xinghun* partner based on their kin roles. In the later stage, Ei frequently considered her *xinghun* partner to be the father of her twins.

Various social research reveals that *xinghun* was often used by non-heterosexual people as a pragmatic coping strategy to meet parental expectations (Choi & Luo 2016, Engebretsen 2017, Wang 2019). It should be noted that entering a heterosexual marriage was never the ultimate hope of non-heterosexual people's families of origin as parental expectations would always involve having offspring. Therefore, *xinghun* shouldn't be understood as merely a solution to ease marriage pressure from families of origin. By discussing *xinghun* in the context of queer parenting, I want to create a wider understanding of the practices of gay-lesbian *xinghun* and co-parenting. My research has suggested non-heterosexual people's motivation for choosing *xinghun* could be linked not only to parental expectations but also to their desires to be 'legitimate' parents that complied with the image of the heteronormative family.

Wen, a 34-year-old lesbian working in a furniture company, didn't consider her *xinghun* marriage to be the result of parental pressure. Also, she didn't equate getting *xinghun*-married with being blindly obedient to her parents.

"I don't like to be pushed. If I felt I was being pushed to do something, I would fight. My parents never gave me any pressure to marry. I chose *xinghun* marriage two years ago not because I must do it, but because I thought I could do it. Being married makes things convenient. I could use it as excuse to avoid the after-work social activities with my boss and colleague. Maybe it sounds like a huge sacrifice to many others, but it was an easy task for me. Also, I want to have children now because it was not a difficult thing for me to do."

Wen spent some time emphasising that she chose *xinghun* out of her own free will, and she was not being used by her *xinghun* husband, nor did she ever use him. Another respondent contended, "*xinghun* is just a lifestyle one chooses." Their narratives indicated that they refused to victimise themselves, but rather to mobilise themselves as moral subjects who could fulfil their filial piety and manage their own life choices (see also Wang 2019). Yet, after learning of other *xinghun* divorce cases in which the lesbian lost the custody of children, Wen was hesitating and thinking about having children by herself instead of co-parenting with her *xinghun* husband.

Young non-heterosexual people, especially queer activists, contended that *xinghun* marriage fundamentally cheated parents and the queer community. Several LGBT organisation workers said,

“These people who choose *xinghun* won’t be interested in doing anything to support our community. Do you know why it is so hard for us to come out? It is because of them.”

Whether one approved of the practice of *xinghun* or not, it was widely agreed in queer communities that *xinghun* was much more complicated than business deals; just like the saying frequently quoted when discussing *xinghun*: “marriage is never between two people, but between two families”. People in *xinghun* marriages often had to comfort their parents-in-law, and both parties might feel wronged during such processes (Tao 2015). In recent years, I witnessed an increasing number of helplines and sharing sessions hosted by LGBT organisations to deal with the legal dispute raised by *xinghun*. Xie kept warning every queer friend, “*Xinghun* will only solve the current problem and leave more problems for later.”

As Ei has specified, there are many forms of *xinghun* marriage; some were more ‘nominal’ and some were more ‘like real family’. Danny planned to only have a wedding with her *xinghun* partner. As a lawyer, Danny didn’t want to get a marriage certificate because “it (legal marriage) involves property”. Moreover, she didn’t want to use her *xinghun* partner’s sperm to have children because “we may scramble for children in the future”. In other words, Danny didn’t want her child to be biologically linked to her *xinghun* partner. What Danny looked for was an essentially ‘nominal’ *xinghun* as she wanted no legal nor parenting bonds with her *xinghun* partner. The only reason she wanted a *xinghun* husband was because she didn’t want her parents and colleagues to suspect that she was a lesbian. It should be noted that Danny’s job as a lawyer allowed her to bear all the costs of the IVF procedure and childrearing. Both Danny and Ei were well-off and have bought their own apartment. Some of their friends had what they called a ‘like a real marriage’ process: the *xinghun* bridegroom’s parents provided an apartment as bride-price and the *xinghun* bride’s parents provided a car as a dowry, and the *xinghun* couple obtained an official marriage certificate and lived together in the matrimonial home. For queer women who were not economically independent enough to raise children on their own and queer men who wanted biological children but could not afford surrogacy, the division of labour in parenting could be ‘like a real family’. The *xinghun* husband paid for the necessary parenting costs, and the *xinghun* wife paused her career for several years to raise the children.

To sum up, having children through the practice of *xinghun* and IUI/IVF technology was often considered a pragmatic option as the parenting costs were shared by the *xinghun* husband and wife. Also, holding a marriage certificate permitted the *xinghun* couple to use ART such as IUI at hospitals and ensured that the childbirth was lawful in mainland China. In this sense, *xinghun* was not seen as merely a solution to marriage pressure, but also a solution to complying with the state regulation which tightly linked parenting to legal heterosexual marriage. The difference non-heterosexual people drew between ‘nominal’ and ‘like real family’ in the practice of *xinghun* was crucial for understanding marriage and parenting in Chinese society. The terms ‘nominal’ and ‘like real’ were used by my respondents to compare different types of *xinghun* marriage and demonstrated their understanding of a normative family in public eyes. For them, the essence of marriage that made it ‘real’ was the gendered division of work rather than an affectionate and sexual relationship between husband and wife.

While Wen and Danny framed *xinghun* as a personal choice that could be adjusted to resemble business cooperation, they neglected the roles of their financial capability and social status that enabled them for such a negotiation. The traditional patriarchal values had a significant influence on *xinghun* arrangements. Engebretsen (2009) suggests that, even in *xinghun*, men and women’s life trajectories are conditioned by gender norms. While men could continue to pursue their careers, women’s choices were limited as they were expected to focus on kids and chores. In the case of gay-lesbian co-parenting, the lesbians’ living arrangements could be further limited if they lacked financial capability. This is illustrated in Ei and her ex-girlfriend’s different experiences during *xinghun* marriage. While Ei argued that *xinghun* could be completely nominal, her ex-girlfriend was not economically independent and thus lacked negotiating power with her *xinghun* husband and *xinghun* parents-in-law. As a result, Ei’s ex-girlfriend’s living arrangement was significantly restricted. Although *xinghun* was seemingly a cooperative and manageable relationship between two individuals, the *xinghun* couple had to deal with their multiple kinship roles with their parents, *xinghun* partner, parents-in-law, children, and same-sex lovers.

Guoji (adopting from a family relative)

I firstly met Tian at a Shenzhen PFLAG talkfest in 2019. He was with his 5-year-old son Xiaoyu and the father-son combination was admired by other attendees with comments like “your son is so cute!” His son was wearing a rainbow name tag and playing with rainbow colour crayons. We had a brief talk when his son drew a rainbow line on my arm. No attendee asked how he ‘had’ his son, neither did I.

Tian was living in Dongguan, an industrial city close to both Shenzhen and Guangzhou. Tian was born in 1980 in rural Yongzhou. Located in the south of Hunan, Yongzhou borders Guangxi and Guangdong. Tian came to Guangdong after graduating from high school as a migrant worker and stayed in multiple places in Guangdong including Dongguan, Guangzhou, and Zhuhai. He has worked at different factories and companies within the clothing industry. In 2008, he settled in Dongguan and his family, including his brother, sister, and parents moved to Dongguan to live in the same neighbourhood. His business mainly sold branded clothes on e-commerce sites since he had connections with clothing factories in Dongguan.

In 2014, Tian found a lesbian in a QQ chat group under marriage pressure and got married in a rush. They obtained a legal marriage certificate as they initially planned to co-parent. Tian’s *xinghun* partner, a young lesbian who identified as P, wanted to marry urgently because she wanted to leave her family of origin and live with her girlfriend. The day after the wedding, she flew to Nanning to live with her girlfriend. Tian and his *xinghun* partner rarely met afterwards. They had an oral agreement on having children before the wedding, while Tian’s partner decided not to have children two years after. Tian explained,

“I am not sure why she changed her mind. Maybe she was afraid that having children with me would affect her relationship with her girlfriend. I have heard many women will focus on their children rather than spouses after childbirth.”

This was a story that I frequently heard from both queer men and women. Tian’s speculation revealed the gendered expectation placed on his wife by wider society. As detailed in the last section, *xinghun* could be much more complicated than cooperative relationships and have an influence on the *xinghun* couple’s intimate relationship with their same-sex lovers. In 2016, Tian’s *xinghun* partner flew to Dongguan to sign the divorce agreement with Tian and flew back to Nanning the next day.

When Tian mentioned his experience of *xinghun*, I felt confused. If his 5-year-old son was not from his former *xinghun* marriage, how did he ‘get’ a son? Who is Xiaoyu’s mother? I asked this question and Tian explained:

“My son Xiaoyu is my blood (*xueyuan*). My little brother has two sons. He and his ex-wife got divorced after their second son Xiaoyu was born. My little brother is with the older son, and I am with the little one now. My brother can’t take care of two sons, so one is *guoji* (adopted from a family relative) by me.”

Tian’s younger brother was a doctor and rarely had vacation time to be with his children. They reached an agreement that Tian could adopt Xiaoyu as his son. In this way, *guoji* transferred Tian’s kin role from being the uncle to the father of Xiaoyu. *Guoji* adoption has had a long history since Confucian China and it was a desirable option for families without sons until the late 1960s (Cohen 2005).

I didn’t mention adoption from social welfare institutions in this research because it was generally recognised by Chinese non-heterosexual people as impractical and undesirable for several reasons. Although unmarried, childless Chinese citizens over 30 years old were permitted to adopt children by the 1991 Adoption Law, most applicants wouldn’t be able to achieve the economic prerequisites set by adoption centres. Furthermore, the China Centre for Children’s Welfare and Adoption clearly stated on its official website that same-sex couples were not legally recognised as married couples and thus were not allowed to adopt from welfare organisations. Where this kind of adoption happened in Children’s Welfare centres, the state was highly involved, investigating the adoptive parents’ economic, health and family status. This further suggested that queer people’s moral qualification as parents were held in question by state institutions. In short, formal adoption from orphanages was not desired by queer people who wanted to be parents for economic, moral, and legal reasons. In the case of *guoji* adoption, the legal process is shortened since the adoptive parent and the adoptive child are already relatives.

Several clarifications need to be made here. *Guoji* was far from an often-mentioned pathway to parenthood in queer life-worlds, especially among lesbians. No respondents ever talked about *lingyang* (a general word for adoption) as a desirable option for having children. There were two other gay respondents who *guoji* adopted sons from their siblings in my research. No lesbian respondents mentioned *guoji* adoption, and it

appeared that few daughters were *guoji* adopted. Besides, blood ties remained the dominating factor in apprehending parent-child relations here. We mustn't ignore the fact that the men in late Imperial China who adopted sons to maintain the continuity of the family line strongly preferred to select heirs from their closest male siblings with the same surname (Walker 1996). *Guoji* could be translated as 'agnatic adoption', while its traditional aim was to ensure the adopted male heir to care for his adoptive parents and worship them after their death (Cohen 2005: 116). Thus, the adopted heir should be old enough to know what was going on and be aware of his filial obligation to his adoptive parents. For Tian and the other two respondents, the main purpose of *guoji* was not to ensure the continuity of family line, but to have a companion in their life. What Tian and other respondents meant by '*guoji*' was not the same as its traditional meaning. Tian also stated that he didn't adopt Xiaoyu for elder support and his brother could take Xiaoyu back in the future if he wanted.

The process of formally adopting Xiaoyu did not go smoothly. To be legally recognised as Xiaoyu's father, Tian had to obtain the signature of Xiaoyu's biological parents (Tian's brother and former sister-in-law). However, Xiaoyu's mother refused to sign the adoption document. Because of that, Tian hadn't completed the legal process yet, which meant Xiaoyu was not legally recognised as his son. Tian seemed to not be worried about that. He simply said,

“Well, if my younger brother or Xiaoyu's mother want to have Xiaoyu as their son in the future, I will return Xiaoyu; but I believe Xiaoyu's *qinsheng*(biological/own) parents would want to give the child a better life, wouldn't they?”

Xiaoyu calls Tian '*baba* (dad)' and call Xiaoyu's little brother '*xiao baba* (little dad)'. Xiaoyu was aware that he has two dads and a big brother. Tian undoubtedly had spent the most father-son time with Xiaoyu. He held all the financial responsibilities as a father, such as paying for Xiaoyu's education. Also, Tian had the authority to take Xiaoyu to different LGBT events.

According to Tian, Xiaoyu's mother had a bad temper and was not economically well-off. As Xiaoyu was going to elementary school, his *hukou*(residence/household) was still with Tian's brother in Yongzhou, Hunan. This meant he couldn't register with the public elementary school in Dongguan. If Xiaoyu was Tian's legal son, Xiaoyu wouldn't have any problem since Tian had already obtained Dongguan *hukou*. At that point, I understood

what Tian meant by a ‘better’ life. Dongguan certainly had better educational resources than rural areas in Youngzhou, Hunan. Therefore, Tian displayed disappointment that Xiaoyu’s mother didn’t give her son the opportunity to receive a better education. Moreover, taking Xiaoyu to travel each summer was also something Xiaoyu’s mother couldn’t do. In fact, Xiaoyu’s mother rarely visited Xiaoyu. Tian’s statement implied that Xiaoyu’s mother was selfish because she refused to let Xiaoyu gain better qualifications to give Xiaoyu a decent life.

In the case of non-heterosexual people adopting children, biological ties with these children could still be essentially important, as the legal policy of adoption didn’t recognise non-heterosexual people as suitable parents. The practice of *guoji* adoption had skipped the first stage of gaining the permission of the child welfare centre as a state institution and it eliminated public moral dispute. Tian was Xiaoyu’s uncle in genetic and conventional kinship terminology. The adoption negotiations happened between relatives instead of strangers. When Tian explained that Xiaoyu was his brother’s son, he used the specific term *guoji* instead of the general word adoption/*lingyang* to legitimate his fatherhood through the conception of *xueyuan* (blood tie). In this way, he also mobilised the kinship terminology, transforming her kin role from uncle to father. Even with the *guoji* adoption, legal procedures might still produce discomfort and confusion around parenthood for queer parents. The other gay father I interviewed had also described that, as an unmarried man, he couldn’t risk his gay identity being found out by the Department of Civil Affairs during the adoption process.

Assisted reproductive technologies alone without entering heterosexual marriage (out of wedlock childbirth)

I messaged An through *Weibo* (a Chinese microblogging website). An was the owner of an investment company. He and his partner Ye have mixed-race triplets and their story of having children through surrogacy overseas has been reported by several news websites, which made them known to the online gay community. An’s *Weibo* was full of admiring comments by other gay men. Many commenters said they would follow An’s path to having children. A month later, An replied to me and said I could interview him with another sociology researcher. When the other researcher and I arrived at An’s company, we found two cameramen with professional video equipment waiting for us. Minutes later,

An showed up with his three mixed-race sons and his mother. An's mother was looking after the children during our interview.

An was born in 1985 in Fuyang, a prefecture-level city in the north-western Anhui province. An emphasised that his father was a policeman and his mother was a teacher, both regarded as decent jobs. An's first job was in human resources. He came to Shenzhen for leisure travel in 2008 and immediately fell in love with the green and humid city. He then moved to Shenzhen, borrowed 30,000 RMB and opened a company. An alleged that his company had grown to being worth a hundred million RMB.

Two months after An moved to Shenzhen, he met Ye on an online *tongzhi* live chatting room. They met in person a week later and moved together. They started to plan for having children in 2011. At that time, Ye was diagnosed with depression. They agreed to use An's sperm since they were concerned Ye's depression might pass on to the next generation. An did research on surrogacy and IVF legal policies and visited hospitals in Thailand, Russia, and China. He even invested in a hospital specialising in IVF in Russia. An has put a lot of effort into ensuring they would have 'good' children. According to An, he carefully selected a good-looking Russian model to be the egg donor since he always wanted to have mixed-race babies. Moreover, he lost 15 kilograms to achieve his best health condition: "I kept tracking my semen quality. In 2013, my sperm vitality had improved to 78%, so I started the process." From 2011 to 2014, An spent more than 4 million RMB (approximately 586 thousand dollars) towards having children. In 2014, three babies were born in a private hospital in Hong Kong. An explained that he has Hong Kong citizenship and mentioned that they stayed in the Hyatt Hotel in Hong Kong for 3 months during this time. An ended his description with an emotional sentence,

"After they were born, I was very excited! They are exactly what I imagined!"

An gave precise narratives on how he had children overseas. Since all procedures were done outside mainland China, An didn't need a marriage certificate. On the other hand, the costs were significantly higher than the previously mentioned strategies, especially when it came to surrogacy. Another gay couple living in Shenzhen spent 1.8 million Hong Kong dollars in total to have two children. For queer women who wanted to do IUI or IVF procedures without getting married, they might either go to an overseas hospital (with or without a Chinese agency) or choose a private medical centre in mainland China which

usually charged higher amounts than the public hospital. Although buying sperm from a sperm bank and doing IUI/IVF were lawful in China, these were not available to unmarried women. In other words, if Chinese non-heterosexual people wanted to have children without getting married and without getting into legally grey areas, they had to do so overseas. An was aware that his description of having children was a powerful proof of his privileged social class. As I will further explore in chapter 5, the emerging ART such as IVF and surrogacy remains a privilege of the global elite class.

Despite the sky-high costs of ART, especially surrogacy, it was undoubtedly the most recent and most desirable option among Chinese non-heterosexual people. For An and many other queer parents, not only could ART be done without the fuss raised by heterosexual marriage, being able to freely choose the egg/sperm donors was a vital point many respondents made. Most importantly, this was often considered the ideal practice for a same-sex couple to have children ‘together’ as their mutual bond, while the previously mentioned practices always involved another heterosexual marriage and another opposite-sex parent outside their queer intimate relationships. As discussed earlier, even the claimed-to-be-nominal *xinghun* could produce unequal relations based on given kinship roles and pose restrictions to living arrangements unless both parties had equal negotiating power.

A *luan* (egg) B *huai* (conceive) had been the most-talked-about Chinese lesbian couples since the 2010s. The process of A *luan* B *huai* is practically the same as what is termed reciprocal IVF in Euro-American societies, in which one partner supplies the eggs to the other, who becomes the gestational carrier of the pregnancy. I choose to use the term A *luan* B *huai* in this research since it is the exact term used in Chinese queer communities. The arrangement of A *luan* B *huai* was sometimes regarded as T *luan* P *huai* since, in most cases, the P conceived the baby with the egg from the T. In some cases, one might bear two children using both of their eggs, referred to as AB *luan* B *huai*. This required the assistance of IVF-EF technology, which was far more expensive than doing IUI. I asked many desiring lesbian mothers why they didn’t choose to bear the child on their own, and they explained that A *luan* B *huai* process would make the lesbian couple feel that the child was consanguineously bonded to both. According to them, the child carried the T’s DNA and was in the P’s uterus to absorb nutrients from P’s body. For example, Pam described A *luan* B *huai* thus: “imagine a baby comes out from my body and looks

like Danny, isn't it wonderful?" In this sense, Pam felt that having children through *A luan B huai* optimally strengthened her relationship with Danny.

Among gay couples, surrogacy was the desired option, as an emerging number of gay icons in China publicly posted their children online and didn't hide how they had their children overseas. Min desired children as he wanted to bring new life into their relationship. Min convinced his partner, and they decided to have two babies through surrogacy using both their sperm and the egg from the same egg donor. As a result, their children would be blood brothers with different fathers but the same mother. By these means, Min and his partner have two sons together. They quickly signed a contract with an agency in California. The egg donor they chose was a Chinese student studying in the States. Min emphasised that the surrogate mother chose this job not because she needed money, but because she wanted to help gay parents like him. In this way, Min felt the choice hurt no one as the surrogate mother enjoyed her job. Gay fathers who had children through surrogacy overseas all stressed that the surrogate mothers were not being exploited and enjoyed freedom during their pregnancy. Surrogacy was illegal in China, though there was an increasing number of private reproductive medical centres and ART agencies associated with the underground market in surrogacy.

Compared to going overseas, some non-heterosexual people decided to do ART in mainland China since it was cheaper and less time-consuming. For most people, they simply couldn't get enough vacation time to do it overseas. Yet these private businesses were not legitimate in China and thus could raise legal issues and even human rights debates. I will discuss further the use of ART and ART business in the next chapter.

Besides financial capability, gender norms often came to shape queer parents' decision-making process when it came to employing ART. In explaining unmarried births to others, lesbian mothers showed different concerns from gay fathers. Although IUI and IVF costed less than surrogacy and raised less moral dispute, being recognised as an unmarried parent in the workplace and in general public could be more troublesome for women. Gay fathers I met didn't think it was an immensely difficult task to explain where the child came from to others. When Tian signed a surrogacy contract with a Thai agency to have his second child, I asked him how he was going to present his newborn son to his parents since he hadn't come out to them at that stage. Tian seemed not to be worried and said

maybe he would just tell others that he had had an affair with a foreign woman (he chose a Thai egg donor). Either way, his parents would be joyful to see their new grandchild. We went on to discuss the difference between men and women and Tian smiled, saying “(as a woman) you may not use the same strategy.” Truly, lesbian mothers I know tended to worry much more about explaining their pregnancy and newborn child to others as an unmarried woman. Moreover, the concern was not merely about social opinion, but also about the social policy regarding unmarried childbirth. Pam was working in a private company, and she explained her worries about doing IVF as a single mom:

“My colleagues don’t know I am ‘les’ and they never see my ‘boyfriend’. I can’t imagine them seeing me pregnant. I am sure they will be puzzled when I apply for pregnancy leave but not eligible to apply for maternity allowance²⁹.”

These respondents’ personal narratives have demonstrated that this seeming ideal practice was only available to the upper-middle-class subject who could afford the high cost of childbirth and parenting and whose career was unlikely to be affected by employer and social policies. Furthermore, in the case of same-sex couples desiring children together, the children could only be legally bonded to one of them based on the law, which they had to strategically overcome to address their needs.

Conclusion: New Moral Dilemmas for Queer (Wannabe) Parents

In short, there are several implications non-heterosexual people emphasised when discussing their motivations for and approaches to having children. The first one is morality. As non-heterosexual people living in a society where having offspring has been a significant aspect of filial piety and only heterosexual married couples are granted legal rights to have children, their desires and pathways to parenthood are central to moral discourse. In pre-modern China, the ritual practice of ancestor worship and the Confucian conceptions of filial piety both placed emphasis on the continuation of patrilineal lineage. Five kinds of relations were put in descending order: ruler-minister, father-son, elder brother-younger brother, husband-wife, and friend-friend. While some queer parents, especially the post-80s and post-70s, explained that they had no choice but to have children to please their parents or to expect elderly support as return from children, many non-heterosexual people disconnected their purpose for having children from the notions

²⁹ The social security departments in most Chinese cities didn’t issue birth insurance to unmarried mothers since they were against ‘planned birth’.

of traditional familial duty and instead framed their motivation for being parents as a positive and voluntary act. Also, a generational shift in understanding filial piety from 'obedience' and 'duty' to 'mutual respect' and 'equal relations' is emerging. In addition, the increasing housing and living costs have discouraged the urban youth from being parents and inevitably shaped how they envision their future care relationships. It should also be noted that parental authority has been weakening. For these reasons, fewer and fewer queer urbanites mention having children as an ultimate solution to fulfil family obligations and to ensure one's elderly support. In this sense, Chinese young non-heterosexual people stressed a moral-immoral divide as well as a modern-tradition divide. By deeming the Confucian tradition of continuing family line as no longer economically rewarding and morally praiseworthy, the young generation in urban China has created a new discourse on morality and immorality. On the other hand, non-heterosexual people's investment in parenting shouldn't be interpreted as being exclusively traditional or modern as their practices don't occupy such a binary. Sorainen's research on queer personal lives in a small Finnish city shows that investment in queer parenting can be "both intimately connected to the family form and very queer" (Monk 2014, cited in Sorainen 2015:48). Following this, I suggest that non-heterosexual people's moves to parenthood can be both linked to traditional Confucian values and queer modernity.

Moreover, the tendency in online and offline queer communities to morally evaluate non-heterosexual people's pathways to parenthood is notable. There are many ways to become a parent for Chinese non-heterosexual people, but they may not be recognised equally in terms of feasibility and moral values. When making their decisions to have children and when reflecting on such decisions, queer parents need to measure their self-interests and interpret their actions in a proper relational manner with other people involved, so they may maintain a moral accountability in their social circles. The discourse of the moral-immoral divide is vital for understanding selfhood in the transforming Chinese society. The Chinese 'self' can be "divided by a number of 'dividers,' such as past versus present, public versus private, moral versus immoral, and so on" (Kleinman et al 2011:5). Yan (2017) has furthered the discussion on the divided selfhood and suggests a tripartite approach to understanding Chinese personhood as both a statement and an action. He argues that, in the dynamic process of 'doing personhood' (*zuoren*), the moralist self is employed to control the desiring individual for the purpose of making oneself the proper relational person (3). A person's moral accountability and reputation are achieved through

cultivating good relations with other people. In this sense, personhood is also a social action, a process of becoming embedded through the three components (ibid). A rather intriguing topic here is the connection between the moral landscape in Chinese society and individual practices of non-heterosexual people. This chapter's ethnographic accounts have demonstrated that there is no one consistent moral stand for Chinese non-heterosexual people to maintain. Building on Yan's argument that personhood is a process of becoming, I suggest that we take all three components - the moralist self, desiring individual, and relational person - to unpack Chinese queer (wannabe) parents' changing moral dilemmas. As a Chinese queer person, the moral worth of one's action is relationally evaluated by their parents, their lovers, their colleagues, their friends, and themselves in a temporal and spatial context. In this context, the discourse on moral-immoral divide is always manifold and dynamic. For instance, Zhenzhen used the prevalent discourse on filial piety to explain her intention to have children as reasonable and morally good, whereas Danny and Pam would blame Zhenzhen for being a selfish person and claim that they would never have children for that purpose. Xie had a son from her previous heterosexual marriage almost two decades ago, so her choice to get married would receive fewer moral criticisms than same-sex desiring people who marry straight people today. When *xinghun* marriages were morally unacceptable in some young non-heterosexual people's eyes, some queer parents like Ei describe *xinghun* as a practical tactic to raise children and to form a socially recognisable normative family. The emerging online and offline queer social circles have also played an increasingly remarkable role in apprehending Chinese non-heterosexual people's personhood. For the younger generation of non-heterosexual people in urban China, being an honest person in intimate relationships and queer friend circles can be as significant as being a virtuous child in their parents' eyes.

The other two factors that arise here within the moral-immoral discourse are law and finance, which I will take up again in the next chapters. In addition to moral measurements, queer individuals' ability to cope with state policy and the rising costs of being parents undoubtedly shaped their decision regarding parenthood. On the other hand, rather than hoping for the existing marriage and adoption law to change, most queer respondents hoped to gain personal agency and purchasing power. In a word, having children is a morally, legally, and financially charged process. This is particularly evident in *xinghun* partners who co-parent. Co-parenting with one's *xinghun* partner reveals the complex

interplay of legal policies, gender norms, and moral values, as non-heterosexual people in *xinghun* marriage struggle to walk the blurred line between ‘nominal’ and ‘real’ marriage. When *zhihun* or *xinghun* marriages came to an end, the custody of children often became the major divorce dispute, according to countless testimonials from my respondents and online discussion forums. The existing policy regarding adoption in Chinese child welfare centres doesn’t recognise non-heterosexual people as qualified parents. The practice of *guoji* adoption from family relatives saves non-heterosexual people from the first step of gaining permission from the child welfare centre as a state institution and eliminates moral dispute. Nevertheless, going through the relevant legal procedures can still produce discomfort and confusion around parenthood for queer parents. Against this backdrop, using ART alone without entering any form of heterosexual marriage has been constructed as the seeming ideal option for queer wannabe parents, especially same-sex couples, when it comes to having children of their own. For non-heterosexual people who plan to have children without entering a heterosexual marriage, the legal challenges they face are, in many ways, similar to people who have ‘out-of-wedlock childbirth’ during the processes of registering birth certificate and *hukou* for their babies, obtaining proper pregnancy leave and maternity insurance, and getting their kids in to a public school. As we shall see in the next chapter, the use of ART has raised further debates on gender and class inequalities.

Finally, this chapter suggests that we re-examine the figure of the child in urban Chinese society. Although family support remains the main resource for old age support in China due to the patrilocal tradition and the lack of public support (Xie 2013), the transforming family structure and parent-child relation appear to challenge the symbolic importance of offspring, and this is especially visualised among young non-heterosexual people who refuse to have children. Do Chinese non-heterosexual people’s reproductive choices resonate with what Edelman (2004) has called ‘reproductive futurism’? If reproduction is no longer seen as a significant feature of filial duty and one’s reliable investment for elderly support, what about its importance in forming family and mutuality/*jiban* for non-heterosexual people? Again, I will discuss this further in moving to Chinese non-heterosexual people’s participation in assisted reproduction.

Chapter 5 Embracing Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART)

This chapter focuses on the interplay of queer social networks and the emerging private assisted reproductive technologies (ART) companies in urban China. It also provides detailed narratives regarding how Chinese queer (wannabe) parents employ ART services to have children. But first, I want to clarify the meaning of ‘Chinese ART companies’ in my research. These could roughly be divided into two groups. One type of Chinese ART company is the ultimate service provider that owns direct access to a complete (underground) industry chain, including doctors and medical centres inside mainland China. Another type is intermediary agencies that have office space and some salespeople who take clients to the actual service providers in either mainland China or overseas. The latter comprises the majority of Chinese ART businesses. Franklin (2013) points out that the pursuit of IVF as a popular conjugal technology is not essentially driven by the desire to have children but is embodied in a sense of centring one’s life around reproduction. To put it another way, the pursuit of reproductive technologies involves not only the desire to reproduce, but also the desire to belong to certain social groups, such as groups of mothers. In this chapter, I will also investigate ART as a conjugal technology between queer couples.

I use data from government websites, mass media, and online discussions on ART to articulate the legal and moral context of ART in Chinese society. My friend-informants from different genders, ages, and classes interpreted the legal and moral issues regarding human gametes selling and surrogacy in diverse ways. This reflects the tensions between law, morality, and socio-economic class that are a theme throughout this research. Furthermore, this chapter illustrates how ART companies and queer organisations sponsored by them continued to shape the notion of reproduction and the future in queer life-worlds.

IVF, Human Gamete Donation and Surrogacy in China

The first baby conceived from in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer (IVF-ET) was born at the Third Hospital of Peking University in Beijing in 1988, which marked the beginning of the history of ART in Chinese society (Ding 2015, Klein 2017). In the last decades, assisted reproduction has increasingly become an area of high-tech expertise.

The use of ART in China is strongly connected with its unique birth planning policy and socio-cultural emphasis on reproduction. Reproduction has been a significant aspect of filial piety in Chinese society for thousands of years, and childlessness was a failure of filial duty to the family (Klein 2017). As a result, alternative methods such as *guoji* adoption from close relatives to deal with childlessness have been documented throughout Chinese history. China's one-child policy was established in 1979 and remained in effect until 2015. In 1991, the state promulgated the Adoption Law of the People's Republic of China to regulate the practice of adoption. Based on this law, adopters must be childless and over 30 years old and have proven themselves to be capable of rearing. This meant a qualified adopter often needed to have a stable and well-paid job, a considerable amount of savings, a house they owned, and a flawless credit report. On the other hand, the ongoing decline in fertility rates in the last decades resulted in fewer children available for adoption than there were before the birth planning policy (ibid). The strict regulation of adoption and the shortage of extra children (especially male children) made adoption a difficult option for people who wanted heirs. In this context, ART has become a vital alternative to deal with infertility.

In 2001, the Ministry of Health³⁰ of the People's Republic of China issued Order No.14, the Management Measures of Human Assisted Reproduction Technology, and No.15, the Regulations for the Administration of Sperm Banks. They came in line with the national family planning policy, meaning that ART, including IUI (intrauterine insemination, also known as artificial insemination), and IVF-ET (In Vitro Fertilization and Embryo Transfer), were only available to married infertile couples. Order No.14 states that medical facilities and medical personnel must not perform any surrogacy procedures³¹. Meanwhile, the two orders prohibit any form of buying and selling of human sperm, eggs, and embryos. In 2003, the Ministry of Health issued a notice concerning the revision of the norms, standards, and ethical principles for ART and sperm banks. The notice stipulates that medical personnel must not apply ART to couples and single women who do not comply with the National Population and Family Planning Law, and must not

³⁰ The Ministry of Health is superseded in 2013 by the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC). In March 2018, the National Health Commission (NHC) replaced the NHFPC and the official domain name changed to <http://www.nhc.gov.cn>.

³¹ Surrogacy is mentioned in Article 3 and article 22, see <http://www.nhc.gov.cn/zwgk/wlw/200804/56c333396f3b4e2ab150491c33129f5a.shtml>

choose the sex of the child³². In 2006, the Ministry of Health issued order No. 44 regarding the regulation of ART and accreditation of human sperm banks, which requires that every infertility centre's licence be renewed every two years. If requirements are not met, the service is suspended. In other words, although IUI and IVF are lawful practices and available in over a hundred accredited medical facilities, unmarried Chinese citizens are not legally permitted to undertake ART or obtain human gametes from these accredited medical facilities. The existing state regulation on the use of ART thus denied parenthood to single and non-heterosexual people and further limited their ability to produce families.

The National Health and Family Planning Commission has reiterated that surrogacy is an illegal practice and has launched special procedures to punish the practice of commercial surrogacy more than once. On the other hand, surrogacy is not literally mentioned in the National Population and Family Planning Law, which has created ambiguity among the public. When the Population and Family Planning Law was amended in 2015, the draft of amendment included a clause banning any form of surrogacy. The members of the NPC (National People's Congress) Standing Committee disputed the drafted clause. Some members of the NPC argued that the primary purpose of amending the National Population and Family Planning Law was to replace the two-child policy with a one-child policy, and that the matter of surrogacy needed further consideration. Consequently, the revised version of the Population and Family Planning Law did not adopt the earlier drafted clause banning surrogacy.

Performing surgery for surrogacy is certainly unlawful in China. Nevertheless, people working for private ART companies have argued that the surrogacy business is in the 'grey area' rather than completely banned by state law. Many salespeople at ART companies used the 2015-revised Population and Family Planning Law as evidence to tell me that "there is no state legislation prohibiting surrogacy". Although the National Health and Family Planning Commission prescribed administrative penalties for surrogacy, the criminal sanction for surrogacy was not specified and was not associated with criminal law charges in China. In this sense, the law existed in a complex relation to surrogacy, as

³² These are listed as 'Principle of social welfare' in the list, see <http://www.nhc.gov.cn/bgt/pw10303/200708/68ba58984aba4a44a3bcf74b0c3e2048.shtml?wYNOrhhjiR4y=1614145744810>

it did not simply regulate the practice of surrogacy, but caused more ambiguities within it. Based on observations in India and the global surrogacy market, Rudrappa (2018) argues that the 2016 ban against commercial surrogacy was brought forward to protect surrogacy, but it would deepen working-class women's exploitation in India and other countries, especially in Southeast Asia. Some private ART agencies in Guangzhou and Shenzhen even stressed to their clients that the Ministry of Health only restrained the practices of public hospitals and medical personnel and thus did not apply to private clinics. *Legal Daily China* released an 'Investigation on the Surrogacy Black Industry Chain' on 17 July 2019, which argues that the underground surrogacy industry chain in China was relatively complete, including the entrusting party, the surrogacy intermediary, the surrogacy mother, the medical personnel or clinics implementing the surrogacy technology, and the device providers of the surrogacy.

Ongoing Debates Over ART in Chinese Online Communities: The Image of a Wealthy Gay Couple and a Poor Surrogate Mother?

Commercial surrogacy and the selling of human gametes have long been disputed within the mass media and internet communities. Since the appearance of surrogacy in China, major online journals have reported on women losing their uteruses and even lives during egg retrieval or surrogacy. On 27 March 2017, *Sohu.com* published a news article entitled 'Renting out the Womb: The Underground Production Line of Chinese Surrogacy Market'³³. This article detailed the story of a 27-year-old woman, Wang Jialan, who became a surrogate mother to ease her family's financial pressure. Before becoming a surrogate, Wang Jialan was an apprentice at a beauty salon. For Jialan, working as a surrogate mother was a way to make quick money and was unlike prostitution. Wang Jialan received a total paycheck of 150,000 RMB from a private ART agency after she gave birth to a child, which helped her family to deal with their financial problems. On the other hand, the clients who want children through surrogacy usually pay the private agency a total of 350,000 RMB to over 1,500,000 RMB. The article points out that the administrative policy banning commercial surrogacy didn't restrain the development of underground surrogacy markets. Furthermore, the growing surrogacy underground chain made surrogates vulnerable as they lack negotiating power.

³³ *Sohu.com* is not the original source. This was originally published in 'news' sections on several websites, while some websites then deleted it. In addition to *sohu.com*, it could be read via *finance.sina.cn* and *Jiemian.com* in January 2020.

On 5 August 2018, *Thepaper.cn* published a news article entitled ‘Investigation of Underground Black Chain Surrogacy Business: 14-year-old teenage girl being tricked into selling her eggs, 850,000 RMB for guaranteed one-stop service’³⁴. At the beginning of the article, the journalist described the experience of a 14-year-old girl, Xiaojuan, who dropped out of school and went to Guangzhou. A web friend talked Xiaojuan into selling her eggs to a private agency. The agency pushed Xiaojuan to complete the procedure when she found out the egg retrieval operation was performed in a rented apartment. The unsanitary and unprofessional procedure triggered ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome for Xiaojuan. This article was republished by various influential news media including *Sina News*. Similar news reports appeared on news websites and TV every once in a while. In these appearances, the surrogates and egg sellers were represented as unenlightened victims who did not know the possible emotional and physical distress caused by these procedures, and the private ART companies were referred to as ‘underground/black businesses’ that cheated and exploited working-class women from rural China. There were parallels here with working-class women’s vulnerability during surrogacy in various country contexts such as India and Thailand (Anu et al. 2013, Rudrappa 2018).

In the mass media, the clients of commercial surrogacy and underground gamete selling were usually desperate couples who were either infertile or had lost their only children and couldn’t find other options to have children. *LegalDaily*’s new report in 2019 showed that 10 to 15 percent of married couples in China have fertility problems, and about 20 percent of them need assisted reproductive technology to get pregnant. The universal two-child policy, allowing all married couples in China to have a second child, became effective in 2016 and notably encouraged the birth of the second child (Song 2019, Zhang et al. 2019). At the same time, older couples who were eager to have a second child realised that they were either infertile or too old to bear a child. Furthermore, the shortage of available human sperm and eggs in accredited medical facilities seemed to leave infertile couples no other choice except turning to the underground ART market. Since 2016, the growing number of older couples desiring a second child has stimulated the booming underground market for informal human gametes trading and surrogacy agencies (He 2017, Sohu 2017). My respondents who had been working in the Chinese

³⁴ *Thepaper.cn* is not the original source. This new article seems to be firstly reported by *chudian* news.

ART industry also agreed that the increased use of private ART agencies and especially surrogacy in China in recent years was linked to the second-child policy.

On the other hand, the mass media coverage of the illegal practices of egg selling and surrogacy has caused some unexpected consequences. An increasing number of people get to know of the existence of ART and become clients of private ART agencies through the news, even where ART agencies are portrayed in a negative light:

“Some parents of gay men didn't know about surrogacy. Once they saw the terrible news about the poor surrogate mothers on TV, they realised that their son could do this to have children instead of marrying a straight woman!” (Chen, the manager of a private ART company in Guangzhou)

The online discourse on ART, especially surrogacy, has become a battlefield where gender inequality issues have been visualised. Many female users of Chinese social media platforms have actively condemned the underground market in egg donation and surrogacy. What is more, people who supported egg donation and surrogacy remained an ambiguous group. The mass media platforms, especially TV news, rarely mentioned Chinese LGBT people as the clients of underground ART businesses. At the same time, it was factual that gay men who employed ART in foreign countries had much more online visibility than heterosexual couples who adopted ART to have children. Edison Fan is one of the gay-identified influencers who chose to have a mixed-race son through surrogacy outside China. His son was born in the United States in November 2017. Unlike most gay internet celebrities who had high visibility within online gay communities, but were otherwise not known by the public, Edison Fan joined one of the most popular online talk shows in 2015, making him famous to the general audience. Geng Le, the *BlueD* app founder, had a baby through surrogacy in the United States in 2017. Some other gay fathers who employed surrogacy have become known in online gay communities through sharing their daily life with their children on social media, including one of my friend-respondents, An. It should be noted that Edison Fan, Geng Le, An, and other gay fathers who openly shared their lives with their children all used agencies in countries outside mainland China. These celebrated gay fathers within online gay communities have arguably co-constructed surrogacy as the most desirable strategy for Chinese gay men to have children. Compared to these gay fathers, heterosexual couples who have children

through surrogacy, either inside mainland China or overseas, kept their practice to a much lower profile to avoid gossip (He 2017).

The growing online debates on the legalisation of surrogacy linked poor women to wealthy couples and gay men. On December 20, 2019, The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) announced that they had received 237,057 online suggestions and 5,635 letters on the draft book of marriage and family, including legalising same-sex marriage (Chinadaily 2019). The announcement by the Chinese governing body fuelled numerous polls and open debates on social media. Shortly after that, debates on same-sex marriage were linked to the topic of surrogacy. A female user, whose web name was A-Yan, posted on the *Douban* forum:

“I voted against the legalisation of same-sex marriage (at *Ifeng.com*³⁵). Do you really believe that if same-sex marriage is legalised, there will be no *tongqi* (wives of homosexual men) women? There is no such thing. Gay men still want to have children, so whether it is legal or illegal, same-sex marriage does not prevent them from *pianhun* (lying about one's sexual desires to marry a straight person) to have children. Moreover, when same-sex marriage becomes legal, gay men will fight for the legalisation of surrogacy as their next stage. Gay men want to promote the legalisation of surrogacy by legalising same-sex marriage. Look at Taiwan and the United States; we know that women's status will become even lower when surrogacy becomes legal. Not only there will be chaos caused by surrogacy, cases of *pianhun* fraud won't be reduced, because not every gay man has the economic conditions to afford commercial surrogacy and they are going to continue to *pianhun*” (A-Yan, posted 22 December 2019).

A-Yan's post, which received more than 400 replies, was not a rare one. Many discussants showed similar worries that supporting same-sex marriage equals supporting surrogacy. Their worries were rooted in the belief that Chinese men would always want a child of their own, regardless of their sexualities. Since the issue of *tongqi* appeared, many women have come to argue that the main reason for gay men marrying straight women /*pianhun*

³⁵ The poll was conducted on <https://news.ifeng.com/survey.shtml?from=timeline&isappinstalled=0#id=15990>, which belongs to the Phoenix New Media company. It asks “Do you support the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the civil code?”. It received 9,909,482 votes.

was to use the *tongqi* wife to have offspring rather than passing as straight. In this sense, gay men who marry straight women used their innocent wives as not only tools for passing as straight, but also surrogates for having children. A-Yan's post entails an underlying understanding that gay men were not pitiable for their use of women's eggs and wombs to reproduce.

An online survey conducted by Ding and Gayspot in 2018 showed that 71% of the gay respondents wanted to have children through surrogacy and 76% of respondents hoped commercial surrogacy became legal in China³⁶ (Ding & Gayspot 2018). What worried the female readers of the survey most was that 56% of gay respondents considered China to be their desired area for commercial surrogacy. A-Yan and other women on social media repeatedly quoted the survey result to prove their argument above. Moreover, I suggest that the increasing online visibility of gay fathers whose lifestyles were endorsed by other gay men has not only strengthened the reliability of the survey result, but also intensified the conflict between the image of gay men as wealthy clients and all women as potential victims. In A-Yan's post, for example, many discussants expressed their anger when they saw gay fathers describe how they select '*luanmei* (literally means 'egg girl')' and '*daimu* (literally means surrogate)' during surrogacy. To cite from another heated thread with hundreds of replies:

"You can tell that these gay men don't respect surrogate mothers and egg donors at all by their words. They treat these women like animals and products without sympathy. I never seemed to feel the kindness of gay men towards women. On the one hand, they want people to understand them and demand social progress to accept homosexuality; on the other hand, they still say 'I need to continue my family line'. If you are gay, you should accept being childless." (Rizhaoyaojin, posted 17 May 2019)

As a female researcher, I could not disregard these voices from women like A-Yan and simply quote words from LGBT-identified people as comment on this matter. During fieldwork, I frequently heard gay men saying, "I am envious of you lesbians. You have a uterus. Having children for you was no trouble." The 'trouble' simply meant surrogacy was more expensive than IUI/IVF, so lesbians could spend less on having children. This

³⁶ Gayspot and Ding released two questionnaires with some similar questions for mutual verification. Questionnaire A received A total of 1,104 replies, and questionnaire B received A total of 1,051 replies.

assumption was not factual, although it unpacked the moral and economic aspects within the practice of having children. The use of ART is undoubtedly always linked with the woman's body. In IVF, the woman's ovaries "are artificially forced to ripen extra eggs, which are then surgically extracted. This process is expensive, unpleasant, and somewhat risky for the woman involved" (Greely 2016:9). Moreover, IVF is often combined with other procedures in the case of same-sex couples having children. For instance, a lesbian couple would need donated/sold sperm, and a gay couple would need donated/sold eggs and a surrogate to have children. Egg retrieval operations and surrogacy cause more physical and emotional discomfort for women, and in some cases, these procedures can even be life-threatening.

For gay men who desired biologically-related children in China, consuming a surrogacy service in a country that had legalised surrogacy was probably seen by the public as the most ethical way. Otherwise, gay men having children would always involve the issue of a *tongqi* being used as a free surrogate, a disadvantaged lesbian in a *xinghun* marriage, or a poor surrogate being exploited. For A-Yan, Rizhaoyaojin, and many other young women against the practice of surrogacy, Chinese gay men became the main supporters for legalising surrogacy in China due to their gender, their role as sons in a patrilineal family, and their desire for biological offspring. In this discourse, *tongqi*, surrogate mothers, and women selling their eggs to private agencies were exploited by gay men and dehumanised as instruments for having children. Following this argument, the legalisation of same-sex marriage became a threat to women's social status and rights, as it might lead to the legalisation of surrogacy.

In addition to the debates raised mainly by women who identified as straight, a great number of queer women compared *xinghun* marriage to surrogacy. Many young lesbian respondents assured me that they would never co-parent with gay men. One young lesbian respondent claimed:

"Gay men want *xinghun* marriage because they can't afford doing surrogacy in countries where surrogacy is legal. They don't want to pay for having children, so they turned to us thinking we can be free surrogates for them!"

It should be noted that, compared to lesbian mothers who used ART, gay fathers were more prone to moral criticism for their use of ART-involved surrogacy. Yet, it did not mean that lesbian mothers' use of ART was ethically acceptable in public discourse.

Rather, lesbian mothers' presence was marginal in public discourse. There were a lot more gay-identified micro-celebrities rather than lesbian-identified influencers in Chinese mainstream social media platforms overall. To put it another way, gay men's use of surrogacy attracted much more public attention than lesbians' use of IUI and IVF. Thus, queer women and queer men did not deal with the same moral discourse when they became clients of ART businesses.

In short, the major platforms for mass media (which seemed to represent the state's attitude due to censorship) portrayed the practices of human gamete trading and commercial surrogacy as not only illegal, but also unethical. At the same time, they displayed an ambiguous attitude toward the clients of private ART companies rather than blaming them. The debates about the practice of surrogacy have been linked closely to issues on gender inequality, which further expanded to issues on gay fatherhood and same-sex marriage, shadowed by conventional gender and kinship norms in China. For many young women in urban China who were concerned about the gender privilege gay men held, gay men were only not a threat to women's rights when they did not desire reproduction and abandoned their existing gender privilege. In these debates, gay men's ethical right to pursue biological reproduction was held in question. The emerging practice of commercial surrogacy has shaped young women's attitudes toward gay men and LGBT communities. Against this background, it is worth scrutinising the relations between queer communities and ART companies and exploring how practices of ART are apprehended in Chinese queer lives.

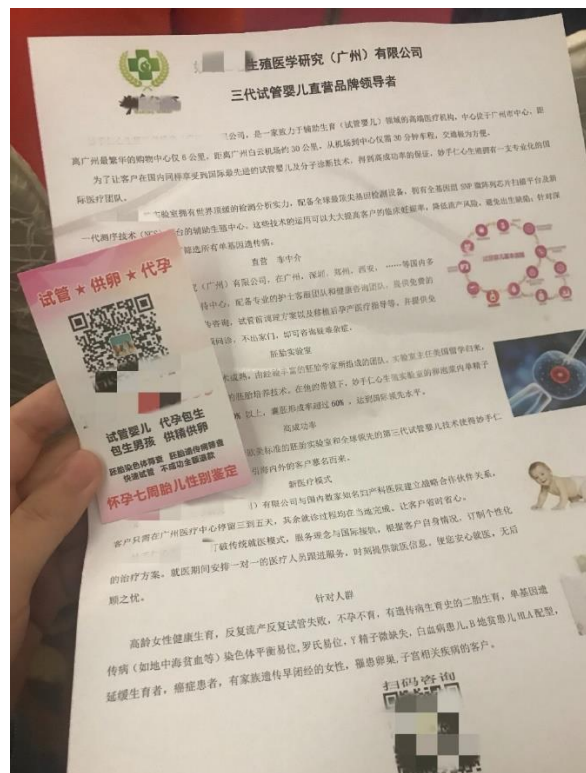
The Only True Sponsor? ART Companies and Their Marketing Strategies with Chinese LGBT clients

On 18 August 2018, I walked into a hotel away from the city centre in Shenzhen to attend an annual national conference held by one of the largest LGBT non-profit organisations. PFLAG China stands for Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays in China. PFLAG China states that they focus on various family issues including parental acceptance, queer parenting, and elderly care. When I was registering for the conference via their WeChat page, I noticed the event's purpose was to "fix parent-child relationships, support family harmony, and build a harmonious society together". On my way from the subway station to the hotel, I met at least 20 volunteers waving small rainbow flags and giving attendees directions. The meeting room for the conference was on the 7th floor of

the hotel. When I walked out of the elevator, I found the corridor and meeting room full of people. More than 500 people registered, and 300 people attended this event. I noticed a roll-up banner (pic.1) of an ART agency named HH Company in the meeting room. There were flyers (pic.2) of the same company on every chair as well.



Pic.1 banner for HH Company



Pic.2 flyer for HH Company

The annual conference started with a short video introducing the history of PFLAG China and emphasised ‘love, understanding, responsibility, family’ as PFLAG’s theme. There were four hosts, two identifying as gay men and two identifying as lesbians. The talkfest consisted of six topics. At each topic, a host would organise the talk with guest speakers. The last topic was ‘having and raising children’. The guest speaker Chen was the business leader of the HH ART Company, which sponsored the conference. She briefly introduced the service that HH Company provides. Moreover, she revealed that she and her girlfriend have twins through IVF. Finally, she promised that clients reaching them through PFLAG China would enjoy the guaranteed success (*bao chenggong*) package without paying extra fees. Chen and her colleagues booked a guest room in the hotel for consultations after the conference.

From August 2018 to July 2019, I attended six PFLAG events in Shenzhen, Dongguan, and Guangzhou (all located within the Guangdong Province). The number of attendees ranged from around 50 to above 300. It became impossible for me to ignore that all of these PFLAG events were sponsored by ART companies. In every event poster, there was a logo of PFLAG and a logo of an ART company (pic.3). At every event, there were representatives from ART companies giving speeches on their experiences of having children. In fact, LGBT people talking about having children has become a fixed part of the program at all LGBT events held by PFLAG China. There were promotional banners and information booths in every talkfest for potential LGBT clients. By attending the events, I got to know Zhao and Chen, two of my major respondents who worked closely with both LGBT organisations and ART businesses.



Pic.3 some posters for PFLAG China events

After moving to Guangzhou to live with his boyfriend, Zhao started job hunting and his previous work experience as a schoolteacher qualified him to be a training manager at PFLAG China. Not long after joining PFLAG, Zhao took on the new challenge of becoming the fundraising manager. As the first fundraising manager at a large Chinese LGBT organisation, Zhao's work experience was significant for understanding the relations among Chinese LGBT organisations and private companies. Zhao had tried to raise funds from various enterprises selling consumer goods. Nevertheless, few of the companies were willing to provide money to LGBT events directly. For instance, some cosmetics and sex toy companies offered coupons and samples as gifts for attendees. On the other hand, the ART agencies gave positive responses to Zhao's request:

“These ART services are almost the only business that supports us (PFLAG China) with real money (*zhenjinbaiyin*). At first, we worked with foreign ART organisations and agencies assisting clients in having children in the United States. Now you see, we are sponsored mostly by the Chinese ART companies because the overseas ART organisations are too expensive. Many overseas ART organisations thought they didn't attract clients from PFLAG and therefore stopped supporting our events. Furthermore, we believe the Chinese ART companies are more affordable for most Chinese LGBT people.”

In 2018, Zhao resigned from his position at PFLAG China. His previous business contact, Chen, reached out to him and offered him a job position in HH Company. Since then, Zhao has worked as a sales and marketing counsellor in HH Company specifically for LGBT clients. Zhao told me that he had thought about finding a new job in another LGBT non-profit organisation, but he then thought that “working in these private ART companies can also help LGBT people”. During the fourth month of his new job, Zhao acquired two clients. One client was a married woman introduced by his lesbian friend, and the other client was a single gay man in his 40s.

Two months after exchanging WeChat numbers with Chen, I had the chance to visit HH Company's main office. Chen's HH Company was the major title sponsor of PFLAG annual talkfests. HH Company was located in a commercial building near several major transport terminals. When I arrived in the afternoon, Chen was chatting with a middle-

aged heterosexual couple and a young woman. She asked me to wait in her office with her other two lesbian friends. After a brief talk with Chen's friends, I realised that the married couple was interviewing the young woman as a potential egg provider for their expected child. "The wife couldn't conceive as they tried many times in hospital", they told me, "but she is so picky about the egg donor. She should know how hard it is to find a woman willing to sell her eggs". I introduced myself and asked about their purpose for visiting the HH Company. They replied that they had known Chen for a long time and were considering opening a branch of the HH Company in Shenzhen. They were very interested in the ART industry as they went over the document Chen provided.

An hour later, Chen finished her conversation and came back to the office to chat with us. Her office looked typical of most Chinese entrepreneurs, with a tea table and tea set big enough for six people to talk while drinking tea. After her friends finished reading the document, Chen handed it to me and said:

"You must know many rich gay and lesbian people. If you introduce customers to us, you will get a percentage of the sales as well! You can cooperate with us like these two. You know you can trust my company as we sponsored PFLAG events. Feel free to look at our service packages and ask questions!"

I quickly went over the document and thanked Chen for her trust. As someone with lots of queer contacts, I had great potential as a sales agent in their eyes. We chatted casually and had several cups of tea. After Chen's friends and colleagues left the office, she started to reveal her personal history.

Chen referred to herself as a T and it was easy for me to tell this from her appearance and the way she spoke. She was born in 1985 in Zhuzhou, Hunan. She came to Guangzhou at an early age for better job opportunities. She has had some romantic same-sex relationships; her ex-girlfriends either cheated on her or entered heterosexual marriages. Eight years ago, Chen met her partner Liu, the sales manager in one of the earliest Chinese ART companies. According to Chen, Liu was a very capable and strong-minded woman. Liu was divorced and lived with her son before Chen '*baiwan* (made someone gay)' Liu. Chen then started working as Liu's assistant. Two years after moving in together, they thought about having children together. For Chen, the process via which to have children was easy due to Liu's position,

“Before meeting Liu, I never knew that I could have children without marrying a man! Liu’s career offered us a chance to get enough information and resources to have children through IVF.”

Chen and Liu quickly decided to have two children using their eggs and the same man’s sperm. Chen called it ‘AB *luan* (egg) A *huai* (conceive)’, a developed version of A *luan* B *huai* and required better medical techniques. They went through the list of sperm sellers at Liu’s company and asked one to provide sperm. Liu gave birth to lovely twins, who were four years old when I met them. Chen mentioned her experience of having children as a lesbian mother every time she advertised the HH Company at LGBT events.

Two years ago, Chen used her experience working as Liu’s assistant to found HH Company with a doctor she previously worked with. Chen was responsible for the sales part and the co-founder specialised in the IVF procedures. According to Chen, there were more than 150 IVF/surrogacy agencies in Guangzhou by 2018, while few of these agencies own actual medical clinics. “A lot of them bring their clients to us because we have a real medical lab”, said Chen. In other words, Chen’s company was the actual service provider in the industry, and she was hoping to make connections with as many agencies as possible. She confirmed that every surgery was performed in their ‘medical lab’ in Guangzhou, including test-tube surrogacy³⁷. Chen’s statement about the number of ART companies was somewhat accurate. As Yang and Yan (2012)’s report indicates, there were four to five hundred surrogacy companies in China: one-tenth of them in Guangzhou alone. *LegalDaily*’s report in 2019 also estimates that there were over 400 surrogacy agencies in China. Since the two-child policy passed in 2015, a large number of heterosexual couples tried to have their second child. Many of them turned to private agencies when public hospitals couldn’t provide satisfying results. Private ART agencies continue to grow in cities. Chen was aware that the business was in the grey area as she mentioned it multiple times. At the same time, she seemed not to be worried about being shut down by authorities. According to her, Guangdong was far from Beijing, so “the policy is more relaxed”. Her company was expanding vigorously across China during and after my fieldwork.

³⁷ I didn’t get to visit the ‘medical lab’. Chen didn’t want non-clients to know the exact location of the lab because they could be shut down and fined if they were discovered by the authorities.

Similar to other Chinese ART companies, Chen's company offered two IVF and two surrogacy service packages for clients. The IVF basic package was around 150,000 RMB and the basic surrogacy package was around 600,000 RMB, excluding the cost of buying human gametes. Choosing the more expensive package means the client can choose the sex of their children (usually for people who want sons). Chen's company provides services for both straight and non-heterosexual people, which was rather uncommon among hundreds of Chinese ART companies. HH Company has divided their target market into six groups, including families who have lost their only child (*shidu jiating*), couples who want sons, couples who were too old to bear a second child after the two-child policy became effective in 2015, couples suffering infertility problems, wives who don't want pregnancy to 'ruin' their bodies, and LGBT people who want children. During my fieldwork, Chen's company established a 'Rainbow Business Division' and continued to develop their strategies to attract Chinese LGBT wannabe parents.



Pic.4 Logos of HH ART Company and its 'Rainbow Business Division'

In 2018, Chen hired Zhao, who had previously worked at PFLAG China. She later hired several other gay men at different LGBT organisations as salespersons. The rest of the HH company employees were relatives of the other main partner of the company. Regardless of their gender and sexual identities, the HH Company employees were aware of the strategies for locating LGBT potential clients through LGBT-themed social media platforms. Chen's colleagues have studied gay and lesbian slang terms extensively, including 1, 0, T, P, and so on. They tried to tell if their clients were 1 or 0 sometimes from their appearance. A married male manager responsible for finding surrogate and egg providers told me he didn't know the meaning of these jargons before he started working at the company. Once, during my visit to HH Company's office, a young male employee

who is Chen's nephew explained to other employees about gay slang by showing them the livestreaming on the *BlueD* (gay social networking) app. He was in several *xinghun*-marriage/queer parenting WeChat groups. Chen firstly taught her nephew to post on gay and lesbian forums alleging, "I want to organise a *xinghun* WeChat group for everyone to meet". After gathering sufficient members in a chat group, he would send each member a friend request and talk to them individually. "You can't advertise directly in the chat groups, and you can't tell them what you do", Chen suggested to her nephew and other new recruits, "you need to let these members browse your WeChat profile and find out what our company does by themselves. Then, they will come to you when they want a child". They regularly post positive news about how they assisted their clients in becoming parents. The tactics of 'pretending' to be lesbians and gay men and organising *xinghun* chat groups were based upon their knowledge of queer daily lives. As mentioned in the last chapter, one purpose for Chinese non-heterosexual people to enter heterosexual *xinghun* marriages was to have children. In other words, people who were interested in *xinghun* were usually interested in having children as the following step.

Not long after they started sponsoring LGBT events, HH Company's 'Rainbow Business Division' established a WeChat Public Account named 'Rainbow Studio'. This account regularly shared LGBT-related news with their company's information attached (see Pic.5). Likewise, a few ART agencies offering IVF/surrogacy service packages in China or overseas own WeChat public accounts named "(company name) Rainbow Baby". They mostly share positive news and useful information on LGBT rights and the development of ART, and implicitly market their services in the contents.



Pic.5 picture attached with 'Rainbow Studio' articles

On December 15, 2018, I attended a “Rainbow family sharing salon” held by Chen’s company. Zhao was the main organiser. The salon was advertised in the *xinghun* marriage/queer parenting WeChat groups and was held in the office of *ZT* (pseudonym), a Guangzhou-based LGBT non-profit organisation focusing on gay health rights. There were 13 attendees, including 11 men and 2 women. Besides me, attendees were all considering or planning on having children in the near future. Some of them felt suspicious of ART companies in mainland China. An employee at *ZT* gave a brief speech introducing the role of *ZT* and Zhao. They then held a warm-up open discussion about coming out. They proposed an interesting angle as they asked not only how to come out to one’s parents as a queer child but also to society as a queer parent. The attendees generally believed that Guangzhou and other big Chinese cities were becoming tolerant toward out-of-wedlock parenting. After the warm-up discussion, Zhao played a video about the queer family. He introduced himself as the former full-time fundraising manager at PFLAG. He then explained the history of artificial insemination and IVF in China. The attendees asked questions about legal policies and disputes rather than the procedures. Like many ART company representatives at the PFLAG events, Zhao also emphasised that LGBT clients get discounts because “life is not easy for us (*dou bu rongyi*)”. Weeks after the sharing salon, I asked Zhao if he had acquired new clients from it, he laughed

and told me people who attended the salon hadn't become his clients yet, but he had secured some contracts with people in the *xinghun* marriage/queer parenting WeChat group where he advertised the sharing salon.

During my visits to the HH Company, I also became familiar with the employees who identified as straight and didn't work directly at its 'Rainbow Business Division'. Most of them were either Chen or her business partner's family relatives. Two of Chen's cousins came from Hunan to work as salespeople at HH Company in Guangzhou. Their clients were mostly from their social circles in their hometown, as they knew many desperate wives who "would give their lives for having a son". Each employee has a particular WeChat account for work. Since I had added both queer and straight employees at the company as my WeChat contacts, I saw their WeChat posts directed toward different groups of clients. For the five groups of potential straight clients, they used a general poster³⁸ (Pic.6 left) which described their scope of services as "test-tube babies (*shiguan ying'er*), guaranteed surrogacy (*daiyun baosheng*), guaranteed baby boys (*baosheng nanhai*), sperm and eggs provider (*gongjing gongluan*)". The poster also shows their genetic testing and sex identification of the fetus services. A WeChat post by a salesperson (pic.6 right) translated as the following:

"(The news title) Wife gave birth to two daughters, this man felt embarrassed and castrated himself with a knife? You have the courage to castrate yourself, why can't you make a turn of your thinking? As in vitro technologies are so mature today, you can decide to have a son or daughter as you wish!"

³⁸ The HH Company circulated this poster in queer events (see pic.2) before they established the 'Rainbow Business Division' and designed specific logo and flyers for LGBT potential clients.



Pic.6 WeChat posts by a salesperson at HH Company

As Mamo and many other scholars point out, while same-sex desires were being constructed as nonprocreative, ART medical specialties were portrayed as curing (heterosexual) childlessness, and their legitimate clients were portrayed as childless heterosexual people. In this way, ART would “reproduce not only human beings, but also natural women and natural families” (Mamo 2007:130). The legal policy in China reinforced this kind of reproduction by restricting the use of ART in public medical centres. Also, state policy normalised parenthood as exclusively legitimate for heterosexual married couples. At the same time, private ART centres like the HH Company have emerged in China, marketing assisted reproduction as both challenging and strengthening normative family forms and kinship norms. In addition to making possible single and queer parenthood, HH Company also fuelled sex selection and gender inequalities that have long existed in China.

Chen’s LGBT clients doubled in 2018. Her marketing strategies with LGBT organisations, including PFLAG China, was indeed one reason for that. Another reason was the relaxation of family planning policies and the information circulation about emerging reproductive technologies. In several major Chinese cities, single parents were no longer required to pay the high social maintenance fees when they register *hukou* for their children. Interestingly, Chen was helping the affiliated agencies who were unfamiliar

with sales strategies for potential LGBT clients. Still, heterosexual married couples constitute the majority of Chen's clients. As Chen explained, heterosexual couples were always in a hurry when they found Chen and Chen's colleagues,

“Straight people usually think of signing a contract with us after they failed several times in a public hospital. They want an immediate result. Lesbians and gay men usually come here to consult and learn the process of ART so that they can make long-term plans accordingly.”

Overall, HH Company's different sales and marketing strategies towards its queer and straight potential clients was remarkable. Meanwhile, services like biological sex selection were popular among all types of clients based on their sales experience. On the one hand, HH Company has employed various strategies to integrate their IVF/surrogacy service with queer organisations and queer online communities as rescuing queer childlessness. They strived to gain attention and trust from Chinese queer wannabe parents through showing financial support for LGBT social events, presenting a particular 'rainbow' company image, and recruiting people with LGBT contacts. For Chinese LGBT organisations like PFLAG China, the choice of event sponsors was expressly limited in the existing social context. On the other hand, HH Company's promotional materials towards a more generally target market showed a preference towards marketing sex selection services, which was legally prohibited and morally controversial in China.

Not long after meeting Zhao, I learned from other PFLAG volunteers that at least three full-time employees at PFLAG China switched to work at private ART companies. Although Zhao stated that he was helping LGBT people who wanted children, PFLAG volunteers expressed mixed feelings towards Zhao and other people who jumped into the ART industry and turned their hundreds of LGBT contacts into potential clients. During fieldwork, many lesbian volunteers told me that people like Zhao were attracted by the high commission possibilities in the ART industry rather than motivated by the desire to help LGBT people. Some lesbian volunteers were particularly disappointed that PFLAG China worked closely with these ART companies. In the group dinner after a PFLAG conference, a young lesbian said in anger, “How can an LGBT organisation, a civil organisation for human rights, promote surrogacy? It hurts women!”

Paradoxically, we sat with two mothers (*mama*) of gay men who were guest speakers in the conference, and I recalled that one *mama* mentioned ART in the conference:

“The posterity issue (for non-heterosexual people) is now easily solved; it’s just a matter of technology and method”.

The tension between being the ‘only sponsor of Chinese queer social events’ and ‘an industry chain that exploits women’ was embodied in the ART companies’ marketing strategies toward their target clients. The relationship between LGBT organisations and the ART industry therefore encompasses not only sexuality, but class, kinship, and gender concerns. Following this section, I will demonstrate how the private ART companies and gay fathers who employed ART attempted to re-phrase their practices around developing new moral perspectives.

“We Are Here Doing Good Deeds”: Non-heterosexual people Working for IVF/Surrogacy Companies

I met Fei in a lesbian online forum when we discussed the issues lesbian mothers might have and I told her the purpose of my research. After learning we were both in Shenzhen, we arranged a Friday night to have dinner together with her girlfriend Zhenzhen. Both Zhenzhen and Fei are from other parts of Guangdong Province and went to colleges in Shenzhen. At the time we met, Zhenzhen was undergoing IVF. She had already gone to Thailand to retrieve her eggs and had ‘selected’ the sperm provider. Out of curiosity, I asked about Zhenzhen’s job. Zhenzhen hesitated for at least five minutes before telling me she had recently changed her job to work in the financial department at a Shenzhen ART agency, which assisted her in her visit to a Thai hospital. She also persuaded Fei to apply for an administrative job at the agency to work with her. Being aware of the online debates over ART, Zhenzhen was worried that telling others about her job at an ART agency would make others judge her morality. Unlike Chen’s HH Company which had access to a complete (underground) industry chain inside China, Zhenzhen’s employer was more of an agency that took clients to the allied hospital in Thailand. She told me that after entering this business, she found out she was overcharged by the first agency she used. “However, I am grateful for this experience because it inspired me to a new career path,” Zhenzhen said. Later, Zhenzhen explained multiple times that her employer was legal. As we talked about the industry in China, Zhenzhen expressed her disgust with Chinese private ART companies involved with the underground surrogacy chain:

“I am telling you; those kinds of Chinese companies are illegal! They have no licence, and they are not responsible. I only work at lawful companies. Although I know they earn more profit than we do, I will never risk working for an illegal and morally corrupted business. It is dangerous! I don’t want to end up in jail.”

After working at the first IVF agency for half a year, Zhenzhen and Fei made a leap to another IVF agency and worked as channel managers. Their new employer was similar to the previous one. Again, Zhenzhen highlighted that her new employer was certified and directly associated with the Thai hospital. Their role was to establish contact with medical personnel in public hospitals, so these contacts could recommend their agency to patients whose needs couldn’t be met by public hospitals³⁹. They told me their working experience in this industry gave them the negotiating power to double their salary. As I have learned, there were not many experienced people in this industry, straight or queer. Zhenzhen and Fei were very passionate about working in the ART industry. Zhenzhen believed this was a growing industry with plentiful opportunities for upward mobility. They told me they had done some research on the salary levels in their job and were confident their income would soon rise again. Zhenzhen added:

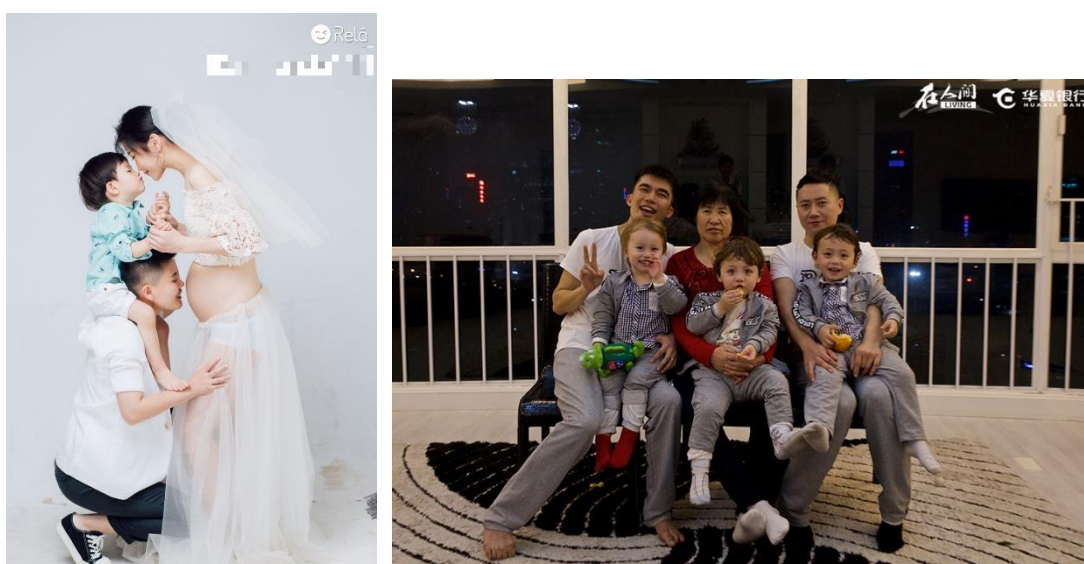
“Don’t you see the top managers of this industry are mostly women? As a client, you don’t want to talk about pregnancy and parenting with a man. Women have more knowledge and advantages doing this.”

According to Zhenzhen and Fei, their boss was a middle-aged homophobic man who didn’t even realise the existence of potential LGBT clients. Thankfully, their boss was not aware of their loving relationship, and they weren’t bothered by the manager’s homophobic attitude. Rather, they have been thinking positively about the future trend of the Chinese ART business. They have been using lesbian socialising apps to reach other wannabe lesbian mothers. Zhenzhen said:

“Once I have a baby myself, I will have an unbeatable professional advantage as a lesbian mother. Some gay and lesbian salespersons don’t have children; how can they persuade other non-heterosexual people to have children?”

³⁹ For example, couples wanting to choose the sex of their child and couples who can’t conceive at all and can only use surrogacy to have children.

Apparently, Zhenzhen was one of the queer parents who sensed the marvellous potential market of the ART industry in Chinese queer communities as a client herself. As a lesbian and a wannabe parent, Zhenzhen was confident that ART would be the most desirable way for Chinese non-heterosexual people to have ‘children of their own’. For Zhenzhen, her gender, her queerness, and expected pregnancy turned from career disadvantages to career advantages in this industry. At the same time, Zhenzhen was sensitive about the existing moral attitudes towards the ART industry. Through repudiating unlawful Chinese ART companies like the HH Company, Zhenzhen sought to claim the moral high ground in this industry. Yet, the emerging ART agencies that took clients to hospitals in Thailand, Russia, USA and other countries were often criticised for overcharging clients. After I went back to the UK, Zhenzhen made another leap to a famous ART agency in Shenzhen founded by a gay man and increased her income once again.



Pic.7 from *Rela* app (left) and *Ifeng.com* (right)

When Zhenzhen was expecting her children as well as a bright career life, there were a rising number of lesbian mothers and gay fathers doing what she planned to do – sourcing clients through same-sex socialising apps. They posted photos of their babies born through *A luan B huai* (IVF) or surrogacy (pic.7) and made suggestions to their followers who wanted to have children through ART. Several respondents used the IVF agency recommended by a lesbian micro-celebrity on *Rela*, who had two children with her same-sex partner. According to Danny and Pam, who purchased the IVF package recommended by the *Rela* micro-celebrity, she was very nice and patient. “She is sharing positive

energy”, Danny commented. This was a core argument these queer micro-celebrities made when they framed their work as good deeds. For them, the emerging image of a loving same-sex couple and one or more babies ‘of their own’ was more encouraging to Chinese LGBT people than the image of gay men cruising public parks. That is to say, they believed that posting their family photos proved the possibility of Chinese non-heterosexual people having long-lasting relationships and a harmonious family openly without giving up their same-sex desires. As experienced queer parents, they were willing to give suggestions to their queer clients about whether to have a mixed-race baby, how to come out to others as queer parents, and how to cope with the existing family planning policy on single parenting. These queer parents were undoubtedly seen as model Chinese non-heterosexual citizens by their followers, though not yet representative. By sharing their experience, queer parents like An and many other micro-celebrities in online same-sex communities have linked the use of ART with notions of ‘rainbow babies’ and more crucially, the desired future for a ‘perfect queer family’ that could live openly in China.

Regardless of the categories of Chinese ART companies and the ambiguous legal policies and reinforcing acts regarding the business, all private ART agencies tended to frame their work in positive language. Just like other ART companies, Chen and An have emphasised that they help both their clients and the surrogate mothers and sperm/egg providers. Since An has invested in a Russian clinic, he told me (and clients) that in European societies, women choose to be surrogate mothers not only because they want money, but because they want to help wannabe parents. Chen, on the other hand, explained that the surrogate mothers her company recruited enjoyed the relatively ‘cushy’ job and generous financial rewards compared to working in a factory. Her colleagues usually distribute small recruitment cards outside the factories around Shenzhen. Chen let me stay in the office once a candidate for becoming a surrogate mother walked in. The candidate took a long-distance bus from a nearby factory to Guangzhou. Chen’s colleague asked the candidate, “Does your husband agree with this?” The candidate said yes and explained her situation. Her family borrowed money from underground parties and had no other way to pay the interest. She had given birth to two sons, which qualified her for the job. After finding out she could not leave Guangzhou to visit her family during pregnancy, she hesitated and said she needed to discuss the issue with her husband. After the woman left, Chen’s colleague told me the candidate wouldn’t take the job because her

sons were too young and complained about the difficulties of employing surrogates and egg donors.

The fact that Chen and her colleagues didn't hide their hiring process with surrogates and egg donors from me revealed something about their understanding of their work. Nor did they conceal their income from me; Zhao, Zhenzhen, and the other respondents who entered the industry as salespeople received a commission from two to fifty thousand RMB for each service package sold. One of Chen's colleagues bought a luxury car within one year of joining the HH Company. After her twins turned five years old, Chen's mixed-race baby daughter was born by a surrogate mother in 2020. The seeming highly profitable and promising market kept attracting non-heterosexual people and especially queer parents into the ART business. Ever since I introduced my research project, respondents working in the ART industry have repeatedly expressed their desire to 'justify' their moral image. HH Company claimed that they didn't abuse surrogates/egg providers, nor did they overcharge their clients; instead, they paid surrogates/egg providers a higher rate than their factory work and they charged LGBT clients a lower rate than overseas ART agencies. HH Company also came up with a special discount service package for same-sex couples. Chen once said, "Doing business is the greatest charity work (*shangye jiushi zuidade gongyi*)", which resonated with Zhao's statement, "working in these private ART companies can also help LGBT people".

As a rising number of non-heterosexual people joined ART companies and attempted to frame their work as a good deed, especially towards queer wannabe parents, it is hard to ignore the underground surrogacy chain and the trading in human gametes. In the HH Company, surrogates couldn't leave the apartment without obtaining permission and were not allowed to have contact with clients. Chen explained that if surrogates went out casually during pregnancy, they might lose the baby; and if surrogates met the clients, they might extort money from clients. Also, the clients could choose to 'interview' the eggs/sperm providers and look at their backgrounds, while the gamete providers wouldn't be able to get any of the clients' details. According to ART companies in China, these rules were set out primarily to protect clients' privacy and rights. Such practices inevitably intensify the unequal relations between surrogates/gamete providers and IVF/surrogacy agencies and clients. As mentioned earlier, gay men's tendency to view women having children as a pain-free task was obvious. Many gay men told me that

having children for me was cheap and easy because I have a womb; others complained that surrogacy was too expensive. In this sense, women's wombs became a simple commodity, and every woman had the freedom to rent them out. The reduction of IVF/surrogacy to merely a 'womb-for-rent' business continued to impact the moral image of queer parents, especially gay fathers, in China. Therefore, I argue their attempts to form a new moral perspective that supports their business has failed to take account of the gender relations in China. What remained more unsettling was the prevailing endorsement of the practice of ART as the most desirable strategy for Chinese non-heterosexual people to build a 'perfect queer family'.

Choosing Own Children?

At this point, it is vital to take a closer look at the actual process of queer wannabe parents using ART. Although ART was often seen as 'the ideal choice' among queer wannabe parents, my friend-respondents revealed that employing ART to have children took much longer than they expected. Many of them changed their initial schedule, their ART agencies and hospitals, the egg/sperm donors, and surrogates due to health, legal, and economic reasons.

Getting to know and sign a contract with ART companies was usually considered the first and most vital step for most queer wannabe parents. Gay fathers I have met prefer to do surrogacy overseas not only for economic and legal concerns, but also motivated by concerns about the healthiness of the surrogates. Gay respondents were aware that women choosing to be surrogate mothers and egg providers in China were in need of money and this was often their only possible motivation. Such motivations inevitably turned surrogacy into an unequal business since the surrogate mothers and egg providers had less negotiating power. Min, who has twin sons with his boyfriend through surrogacy in California, told me that the surrogate mother of their children was a religious white woman. Min felt his choice in having children was morally acceptable since the agent told him the surrogate mother chose her job for good reasons. Furthermore, Min was impressed by how healthy the surrogate mother was, believing Chinese surrogates would not be so healthy. For Min, the surrogate's health condition had a direct influence on the health condition of the baby:

"I thought the egg donor was more important than the surrogate mother since the children had her genes, then I found I was wrong. The surrogate mother is very

important. Our surrogate mother is a devout believer who has a strict daily routine. She is very healthy. After the babies were born, she provided enough colostrum. Because of that, my sons are healthy. I am grateful for that.”

Many non-heterosexual people doubted the reliability of Chinese ART companies. Although a large amount of money was circulating in this industry, the contract between Chinese ART companies and clients were generally invalid in Chinese law due to their violation of public interest (Ding 2015). In most cases, they were ‘gentleman’s agreements’ that solely depended on mutual trust. The disputes over the contract and custody of children related to IVF and surrogacy were brought to the courts from time to time, and the courts have presented inconsistent views on these disputes (ibid). An attendant of the “Rainbow family sharing salon” co-organised by the *ZT* organisation and HH Company commented, “I’d rather pay more (to foreign ART companies) to avoid disputes”. Obviously, this man didn’t become a client of the HH Company.

Tian said he simply didn’t trust Chinese businessmen during a one-to-one conversation even though he belonged to this group. Tian owned an online shop and most of its merchandise was cheap international branded clothing direct from factories. He reasoned that Chinese businessmen didn’t have religion and therefore had low moral standards. It should be noted that the primary reason he didn’t choose a Chinese surrogacy company was through a lack of trust. Eventually, Tian signed a surrogacy contract with a Thai agency with Chinese-Thai translators. Likewise, Zhenzhen claimed that her agency worked directly with Thai hospitals, though the contract between these kinds of agencies and clients was legally invalid as well. To put it another way, many non-heterosexual people didn’t consider doing ART inside China as a satisfactory option.

Queer wannabe parents became clients of Chinese ART companies mainly for their competitive price packages and convenient location. After I had known Wen for two years, she started researching Guangzhou ART companies and asked me if I knew any good ones. She was eager to conceive before she reached 40. Wen did a lot of research on the pricing and the marketing of IUI and IVF services. Although she had little trust in Chinese ART companies, they remained the only affordable and practical option for her. Wen’s job wouldn’t allow her to take a long overseas trip, and the Chinese agency offered her a cheaper IUI package for less than 80,000 RMB.

As I point out in the previous chapter, being able to freely choose the egg/sperm donors was a vital preference many respondents emphasised. Each queer parent who employed an ART service gave me a detailed elucidation of how they made their investigations and final decisions in selecting the suitable sperm/egg donor or surrogate mother. They looked at the egg/sperm donor's skin colour, height, educational background, career, health condition, and other characteristics. Zhenzhen showed me the photos of candidates of sperm donors when we talked about her trip to Thailand to prepare for IVF cycles. All photos had the candidates' personal information attached. She told me she interviewed the candidates for a whole day:

“These candidates are all good-looking! One of them is a TV actor in Thailand and he came with his broker, but I doubt he was wearing heightening insoles to fake his height.”

Zhenzhen eventually selected a model in Thailand as she felt the person was sincere during the interview. She further explained how she selected the sperm donor:

“You need to meet them in person, so you know if they lied about their height or anything. I found out many of the candidates in Thailand are gay and lie about their sex life in order to be sperm donor. But I don't want a gay man to be the sperm donor; I am afraid they might have HIV.”

As Zhenzhen showed me the photos of the Thai candidates and told me more about them, I didn't comment. Zhenzhen's words reflected her perspective on human gamete providers, which was prevalent among people who used ART-related service: one must be suspicious of the ART agencies and people involved as they could lie. During my time in Chen's ART company, I noticed that interviewing the egg/sperm donors and asking a series of personal questions was generally preferred by clients, even if they needed to pay an extra price for it.

Min and his partner bought an ovum from a Chinese student studying in the United States. According to Min, the average price of an ovum was 8,000 to 10,000 dollars, while they paid 15,000 dollars for an ovum since Asian ova were rare in the USA. Min was willing to pay a higher price for an Asian ovum because he wanted Chinese babies rather than mixed-race babies. As a university professor, Min didn't want his children to attract attention from others. His concerns resonate with several lesbian respondents' statements on having mixed-race children: having a mixed-race baby meant other people would

always be curious about the baby's other biological parent and even ask rude questions, which might cause trouble parent's career.

An, an openly gay father of three sons and a successful entrepreneur living in Shenzhen, said that he spent more than four million RMB on having his mixed-race triplets. An visited hospitals in Thailand, Russia, and China multiple times before deciding where to use surrogacy services. As the owner of a private enterprise, An welcomed public attention to his 'rainbow' family rather than being afraid of it. An was aware that the news about his mixed-race sons and family helped him gain much attention and fuelled his Russia-based ART agency. During and after my fieldwork, An sent his mixed-race sons to numerous talent classes and variety shows.

In short, the experience of these queer parents who employed ART has echoed Chen's saying, which is "Wait until you are wealthy enough to have children". This statement associates parenthood with personal agency and resources. This kind of rhetoric, used by queer parents and ART companies, resonates with Mamo's research on lesbian mothers who employed ART in America. Society delivers a message that "individuals with agency can overcome constraints with the right attitude, knowledge, drive, and choices" (2007:230). Few respondents in their 20s have the financial confidence to consume ART services and raise children by themselves. Rather, they told me that they need to have a stable conjugal relationship and generous income to have children and form a perfect queer nuclear family. The freedom of choosing a reliable and 'personalised' ART service and thus a desired biological child of one's own were only available to people like An. On the other hand, it is increasingly difficult for the young generation to achieve upward mobility in urban China.

Furthermore, the ability to cruise the legal 'grey area' freely has become a key personal skill for both ART companies and desiring queer parents in China. For the HH company, it was the ability not to be fined or shut down by the local authorities that made their business sustainable. Chen and her peers were extremely careful to avoid drawing any attention from state authorities, and they changed their social media profile information regularly. Chen never sent me any typed messages and, whenever I asked questions about her business, she would tell me to visit her company to talk in person.

Queer parents who employed ART without entering legal marriages had to cope with the legal ambiguity and sometimes difficulties that went along with their unmarried status and out-of-wedlock children. Some respondents solved these problems with a considerable amount of money, and some solved them with their social relations (*guanxi*) with officials. It has only been recently that major cities have stopped charging social maintenance fees for out-of-wedlock births. Still, in most parts of mainland China, unmarried parents had to pay more money and go through more bureaucratic processes to get proof of paternity and other legal certificates. Gay fathers who have children through surrogacy often need to provide officials in police stations with a made-up story when they register birth and *hukou* information for their newborns. For instance, Tian pretended to be a single heterosexual man who had had a romantic encounter with a Thai woman when he brought his newborn son to China. When he went to the airport and the police station with his little son, he told the governmental officials repeatedly that the mother didn't want the child and showed them a written claim by the mother. The written claim was provided by the ART agency, which included it as a part of their service package. These alleged 'tactics of convenience' were used frequently by other gay clients and circulated in queer communities.

Conclusion: Reproduction Without Sex – A Liberating Future or Unaffordable Hope?

Since IVF appeared, it has been realised as the crucial method that will lead to the end of sex as the only way to conceive (Greely 2016). By this time, IVF and IVF-related reproductive technologies have become a "better-established and widely available consumer option, and itself a more normalized and naturalized activity" (Franklin 2013:228). It becomes vital for researchers to not read reproduction as merely 'biology' or read IVF as merely a 'biological technology', for IVF ultimately transformed our understanding of biological relations and points to the future of reproduction and kinship (Franklin 2013). As mentioned earlier, Chinese queer people's desire to have children is closely bonded with the ever-changing notions of filial piety, elder care, and individual choice. The unstoppable trend of using ART to have a biological child among Chinese non-heterosexual people suggests some inconsistencies with regards to their understanding of social ties and biological relatives.

Chen once said, "It (IVF/surrogacy) is no different from having children by your own." I couldn't count how many times I heard similar statements from ART salespeople, from

my friend-respondents, and from my ex-stepmother who had a daughter through surrogacy in Shenzhen. From their point of view, the parenthood of a biological child was naturally unquestionable without the need to be constructed, and it wouldn't be threatened by the involvement of technology as long as using one's own sperm/egg. Such a statement inexorably reinforces the notion of blood ties and distinguishes biological parenthood from non-biological parenthood.

It became palpable that these queer parents and ART companies co-constructed ART as the ideal way for Chinese non-heterosexual people to have 'children of their own'. The practices of *A luan B huai* and surrogacy have further emerged as desirable techniques for Chinese same-sex couples to have children together. With the emergence of Chinese ART companies and their marketing strategies towards queer communities, queer wannabe parents appeared to have more choices as they could have access to ART either in foreign countries or in mainland China. My respondents' personal accounts are immersed in the language of choice and kinship, including how they chose the ART agency and service packages, how they selected the eggs/sperm providers, how they decided to have mixed-race babies or not, and how they made such choices with their partners and other family members.

From the very beginning, *A/AB luan B huai* emerged as an ideal technological device for lesbian couples in urban China to form co-motherhood rather than to overcome infertility. Unlike Mamo (2007)'s lesbian interviewees in California, who turned to advanced technologies only if other technologies failed, many of my friend-respondents actively sought out reciprocal IVF as their first choice. In this sense, Chinese lesbian couples' use of IVF has indeed queered the heteronormative knowledge of reproductive technologies and parenthood, even if they didn't intend to challenge the cultural norms. It's worth noting that both the practice of *A/AB luan B huai* among lesbian couples and surrogacy among gay couples have transformed how we understand the adjective 'biological', and the varied arrangements in queer couple's use of ART has destabilised the popular belief that T-P/1-0 roles are an imitation of heterosexually gendered relations.

This chapter closely engages with the ongoing debates around choice and individuality for non-heterosexual people (Weston 1991, Dempsey 2010, Gabrielson 2011, Lo 2020). Choice is an individualistic and bourgeois notion (Weston 1991). The language of choice,

free will, and self-determination risks “concealing the structural forces and inequalities that shape reproductive decisions”. (Gammeltoft 2014:16). Strathern (1992a) also points out that choice in English society has become naturalised and constrained by consumer culture whose conventions are internalised as personal style. What becomes clear is that we can’t examine the alleged personal choices and social constraints as self-evident and mutually exclusive conceptions. This chapter, together with chapter 4, delineates how market and economic conditions shaped queer (wannabe) parents’ decisions regarding whether, when and how to have children in addition to state and cultural conventions. As the consumer of medical services, queer (wannabe) parents’ practices were marked by social stratification along knowledge, resources, and power. What is more, being middle-upper class customers, non-heterosexual people’s practices of choosing egg/sperm donors and surrogates risked commodifying the disadvantaged latter group and reinforcing social stratification.

With the assistance of IVF-related ART, queer individuals and couples may have biologically-related children without sexual intercourse and without entering any form of heterosexual marriage, but the high costs of IVF and the required extensive timeframe for such procedures arguably enable capitalist reproduction in queer sexual citizenship. As Mamo points out, “the history of assisted reproduction is a history of the enforcement of biopower” (2007:57). Queer parents’ participation in assisted reproduction has enacted stratified reproduction, that is, the medical support only available to certain groups. As many studies indicate, ART remains restricted to the global elite class (e.g., Twine 2015, Mamo & Alston-Stepnitz 2015). Furthermore, the emphasis on ART as the ultimate solution in queer life-worlds reconsiders and requalifies the concept of queer sexualities as reproductive. In the context of ART, queer futures are simultaneously made possible and normalised. If a desirable queer future can be reached only through reproduction and a desirable queer (nuclear) family can be formed only through ART, one may ask: is there no future for queer, or poor people?

Furthermore, as all my friend-respondents stated, the cost of ART services was small compared to further parenting costs. In the case of same-sex couples having children together through ART, the children could only be legally registered with one parent, an issue which they had to strategically overcome to address their needs. The categories of biological relative (for example, egg donor), as Strathern argues, results in a distinction

between social and biological parenthood (1992b: 19). In the context of queer parenting in China, this further created an alleged distinction between biological, social and legal parenthood. The next chapter moves to explore the interference between ideas of the ‘biological’ and ‘non-biological’ and the construction of good parenting in Chinese queer life-worlds.

Chapter 6 Negotiating Conjugal and Parenting Relationships

In this chapter, I discuss queer parenting in urban Chinese society. As this research has documented, there are various models of queer parenting that have existed in urban China for years. Queer parents have children through previous heterosexual marriages, *xinghun* marriages, *guoji* adoptions, or ART solely; they are single, divorced parents or they co-parent with their same-sex partners. For queer couples, having children together has increasingly become a key strategy to strengthen their conjugal relationship. Yet, the recognition of the child as a mutual bond/*jiban* between same-sex couples only works under certain conditions. In other circumstances, it could work the opposite way. What continually came to my attention during my fieldwork was how my respondents used their understanding and language to distinguish ‘my children’, ‘my partner’s children’, and ‘our children’, and how they integrated such distinctions into their relationships with partners, families of origin and wider society.

The study of kinship has always been a vital and dynamic field in anthropology as the knowledge of kinship is continually destabilised and renewed. Strathern(1992a) makes it clear that the facts of kinship are simultaneously facts of nature and facts of culture and society. Sahlins proposes the idea of the “mutuality of being”, in which kinsmen are “persons who belong to one another, who are members of one another, who are co-present in each other, whose lives are joined and interdependent” (2003:11). Kinship relationships are rarely severed nor end completely, and even the breakdown of relationships, as with divorce, can lead to the re-ordering of social continuities (Simpson 1994, Strathern 1996). New kinship studies have indeed shaped the discussion about family relations and intimacies today. Developed from these arguments, we should be careful not to presuppose what constitutes kinship or ‘authentic’ forms of kinship. Rather, my purpose is to make visible how my respondents make claims on kinship as their social facts and what they do with them. Moreover, this chapter explores how Chinese queer parents understand their role as parents and non-heterosexual subjects in Chinese urban cities.

‘My Own Children’ versus ‘My Partner’s Children’

I have known Ei for years. As I detailed in Chapter 4, Ei had twins through a *xinghun* marriage and later divorced her *xinghun* partner. Ei and her *xinghun* partner are the twins’ biological parents, and they occasionally spent some family time together. Born in 1982, Ei often referred to herself as more ‘traditional (*chuantong*)’ and more focused on family than younger generations. After the twins were born, Ei’s parents moved to Ei’s house to care for them. Ei immediately started to look for girlfriends after her twins were born. Despite the fact that these women often stayed in Ei’s apartment, Ei’s parents never asked Ei about her relationships with them, and nor did Ei say anything. Like many other respondents, Ei interpreted her parents’ response as ‘silent acceptance (*moren*)’ of her same-sex relationship. Still, Ei had been complaining to me about her intimate relationships. She told me that ever since she had had children, the dates she met through same-sex socialising apps were constantly jealous of her children, causing numerous quarrels. For Ei, her children were her major focus, and she spent the most time with her children rather than with girlfriends. One of Ei’s dates, who was in her mid-20s, once told Ei that “if you treat your children so well, you should treat me the same”. Yet, Ei felt uncomfortable with such a comparison. She admitted that she couldn’t spend the same amount of time and money on any future girlfriend as compared to her children. Furthermore, Ei referred to her children as her blood and family, whereas she never referred to her ex-girlfriends and dates as her family members.

Ei’s understanding of her children indeed resonated with her experience with her ex-girlfriend, whom she was with from 2009 to 2015. The major reason they broke up was that her ex-girlfriend had a child with her *xinghun* partner and tended to focus on the child and *xinghun* family rather than Ei. Ei’s ex-girlfriend had been living with her *xinghun* husband and parents-in-law after the wedding. After giving birth to a son, Ei’s ex-girlfriend stayed with her *xinghun* family and rarely went out to meet Ei. At first, Ei thought her ex-girlfriend was just feeling tired after childbirth. Not long after, Ei realised that her ex-girlfriend wanted to take care of the child rather than spending time with her. Ei felt like an outsider in her ex-girlfriend’s *xinghun* family and told me she couldn’t even give her ex-girlfriend’s child a nickname. Ei’s attempts to participate in the child’s life failed, and she blamed her ex-girlfriend for not being independent enough. Ei concluded her experience with her ex-girlfriend as a lesson learned: “If you are weak, your *xinghun* marriage becomes a real marriage, and you become a real wife”.

Ei didn't become the co-parent of her ex-girlfriend's child, although she expected she would do. They eventually broke up over the phone. As a result, Ei felt her ex-girlfriend formed stronger kin relations with her *xinghun* nuclear family which she was an outsider to. After Ei started co-parenting with her *xinghun* partner, Ei realised that her children were so crucial to both her and her *xinghun* partner, that she would never expect her future girlfriend to see her children the same way. In this sense, by treating her children as her blood tie and essential family members, Ei seemed to emphasise the significance of blood relations as authentic and unbroken and therefore deny the possibility that her future girlfriend could blend in as a family member.

I asked Ei about her expectations for a girlfriend and she answered:

“I just want a girlfriend that I can spend some time with. In a few years, I will be worrying about my children's life at school and have no more time to play with girls”.

According to Ei, dating (*tanlian'ai*) and living together (*guorizi*) were two different things. The former was just 'playing', while the latter was far more complicated and involved dealing with more complex kinds of relation. Ei prioritised her relations with her parents and children as blood ties. On the other hand, Ei expected her younger dates to accept the arrangement that Ei had 'another' part of her life with her children. Ei's expectations for her future imitate relationships was valenced by the comparison with her blood relationships. To put it another way, Ei anticipated that her blood relatives would be the key support resource in her elderly life, whilst she didn't think a girlfriend would accompany her when she grew old. In this sense, same-sex dating was a time-limited relation without a future. Ei asked me to introduce potential girlfriends to her, although I never managed to do so. Among young lesbians I've met in urban Chinese cities, Ei's ideas about children and relationships were morally contradictory, if not selfish.

Having children has drastically altered Ei's romantic relationships although she once claimed that “children and girlfriend are separable so they don't affect each other”. She couldn't let her girlfriend stay over for more than a few days, since she lived with her two children and parents. Also, Ei's *xinghun* partner still visited their children on a weekly basis despite their being divorced. Therefore, Ei's claim, or her effort to 'separate' her children and girlfriend into two different relationships, didn't lead to the result she desired.

Rather, the disconnection between her children and girlfriend has limited her capacity to maintain a lasting same-sex relationship. Since Ei was a single and divorced mother, the issues she had in same-sex intimate relationships have resembled other single/divorced mothers in heterosexual relationships. Many people, including gay men, used to quote the popular belief that mothers always focus more on their children than anyone else. In the meantime, people I have met during fieldwork held a popular opinion that gay fathers were less bothered by parenting because they were not socially expected to stay home and look after children. Additionally, Ei's tactic to not explicitly introduce her romantic relationship with her girlfriend to her parents again limited the possibility of building connections between her family of origin and lovers.

Ei's personal experience renders the often-talked about myth in same-sex communities about the harmonious co-existence between 'my children' and a same-sex lover for a queer parent. Many Chinese non-heterosexual people, including Ei, who had their biological children, doubted that they could find a same-sex partner who treated the children as their own. The hope for having both a blood-related child (especially through heterosexual marriage) and a same-sex lover was increasingly perceived as selfish among queer youth, as they believed that a loving partner shouldn't be treated as less important than blood relatives. In this sense, it became intolerable if their queer lovers placed more emphasis on their biological children than them. This was what Ei's young lover expressed when she said, "if you treat your children so well, you should treat me the same". The underlying logic of this statement symbolises resistance to the Confucianist hierarchical order of kin relations where conjugal relations were less important than parent-child relations. This emerging opinion among young lesbians had led to older lesbian mothers like Ei and Guan complaining that there was little chance of them finding a girlfriend. Some lesbian mothers thus claimed to their potential dates that their children were 'left' with grandparents and that they were free from parenting responsibilities. Such statements seem to suggest the competing relations between children and partners, revealing the perception that a queer subject needed to cut loose the relation with their children (and sometimes together with the family of origin and *xinghun* partner) to pursue romantic relationships. Otherwise, they may face moral criticisms from other young gay and lesbian people.

Tian (previously mentioned in chapter 4&5), a gay father of two sons, broke up with his ex-boyfriend when he was planning to have his second child:

“We have been together for years. He showed no interest when I asked him if he wanted children with me, so I did it using my sperm. He said he was fine with it, but his indifferent attitude annoyed me. He should have at least asked about the surrogacy progress. He seemed to never care about my sons. What’s the point if my partner didn’t want to be involved in my life with my children? I felt lonely, so we separated.”

Tian came out to his mother after his second son was born. After Tian brought his son back from Thailand, he was still looking for a committed relationship. “It’s best to have three children”, Tian told me, “I want to have my third child with my future partner; we can use his sperm”.

It shouldn’t be discounted that, when same-sex couples were planning to have children, the recognition of parenthood as single/joint could constantly be in negotiation. “I am not going to take care of other people’s children”, said Zhenzhen (previously mentioned in chapter 4&5) during a casual dinner. Just turned 24 years old, Zhenzhen was going to have her first child while living with her girlfriend Fei in Shenzhen. We had a conversation on the relationship between ART and parenthood. Zhenzhen expressed her desire to have children through surrogacy:

“I am young. I don’t want to waste my youth in pregnancy. The previous (egg retrieval) surgeries I did have already frightened me. I am considering surrogacy, but it is very expensive. I really want Fei to carry my baby. However, she is too skinny. Also, my mother and I think it is unfair to her. She would be just like a surrogate since the baby would be my legal child.”

I asked Zhenzhen: “but if Fei gave birth to your child, she could be the child’s legal mother?” I said this to Zhenzhen since, by that time, I had known lesbian couples planning to do the A *luan* (egg) B *huai* (conceive) method and assumed Zhenzhen and Fei could follow this trend to obtain joint parenthood. Zhenzhen answered:

“No, the child has to be my legal child and be in my *hukouben* (household register booklet). That’s why I think this is unfair to Fei. If she left me, she would lose her best times and she would be an unmarried woman who had given birth. How would she find a new partner?”

Zhenzhen compared the *A luan B huai* method to surrogacy, as she thought if she asked Fei to carry a baby using her egg, Fei would be like a free surrogate without receiving any benefits. Fei held the same opinion as Zhenzhen. The key factor that they didn't consider *A luan B huai* as a desirable method was Zhenzhen's insistence on registering the expected baby as her child rather than Fei's child. Thus, the child would be biologically and legally Zhenzhen's child, whereas Fei's connection with this child would be held in question. In this sense, Zhenzhen and Fei had little confidence that the child would be 'their child'. Zhenzhen continued to treat the process of having children as her own business, despite hoping that Fei would care and support her.

From Zhenzhen's words, it was obvious that Zhenzhen valued her mother's opinion during the process of having children. It was Zhenzhen's mother who encouraged Zhenzhen to have children both biologically and legally. To further complicate this matter, as queer individuals choose to have children with or without their same-sex partners, whether their parents recognise their children as grandchildren was a significant issue to be taken into consideration. Zhenzhen and Fei told me that, although Zhenzhen had never mentioned her lesbian desires to her parents, Zhenzhen's mother was alerted and even showed suspicion and discontent when she found out that her daughter was living with a woman. However, after they lived together for more than a year, Zhenzhen's mother started to 'silently acquiesce' in the fact that her daughter was not going to marry a man and instead hoped Zhenzhen would have offspring. This is not unique in Chinese non-heterosexual people's experience, as offspring are often seen as the trade-off for the acceptance of a same-sex partnership. To put it another way, parental acceptance of same-sex desires/relationships doesn't necessarily reduce the pressure to marry and have children for my friend-informants and many others.

Against this background, Zhenzhen confirmed that her child had to be legally registered with her *hukou* so that the child would be legally the grandchild of Zhenzhen's parents. In another WeChat talk, Fei explained:

"It's not that I don't care about Zhenzhen. She accused me of being half-hearted towards her parenting plan. I honestly don't know what she expects from me. I just graduated from university; I am not ready to be pregnant or be a parent. I am her girlfriend, not her wife. Her mother won't think me as her wife as well."

When Zhenzhen was preparing to be a mother, Fei had not yet come out to her parents. For Fei, Zhenzhen's expected child could never be accepted by Zhenzhen's parents as a grandchild. From 2018 to 2021⁴⁰, I heard Fei reassure Zhenzhen many times that she was willing to raise Zhenzhen's child with Zhenzhen, but their co-parenting plan was never settled between them and their families of origin.

Zhenzhen, Tian and Ei's expectations of their same-sex partners were ambiguous and inconsistent. The focus on blood ties and the emphasis on having one's 'own children' inevitably shaped their conjugal relationships with their same-sex partners. Meanwhile, people in queer communities have come to notice that cultivating a conjugal relationship with a queer parent might require a living arrangement with 'their children'. The question of how should one treat same-sex partners' children remained highly controversial in queer communities. Indeed, many online discussants and respondents stressed that they could not treat their partners' children as their own simply because "it's their blood (*xueyuan*), not mine". In other words, they held that the centrality of blood relations was an unshakable social fact that was more powerful and more secure than their 'unprotected' intimate relationships. Ei and Tian could break up with their same-sex lovers and cut their relations completely, but not do the same with their biological children. In this context, they made a distinction between reversible and irreversible relations. Their partner's children couldn't be biologically and legally recognised as their own heir, and therefore had no responsibility for taking care of them when they were old. To put it concisely, the underlying logic was that their partner's children were by no means their future, and therefore not worth any investment.

Furthermore, my respondents tended to use their same-sex partners' negotiations with blood ties and lovers as a significant criterion for their loving relationships. Mo (previously mentioned in chapter 3), living with her girlfriend Lin in Shenzhen, strongly refused to see or live with Lin's school-age son. Lin's parents in her hometown convinced her to enter a heterosexual marriage and have a son. When Lin tried to divorce her legal husband, who she only saw once a year, he asked Lin to take custody of their son. Mo told Lin that she hated taking care of little children, especially boys. Eventually, Lin gave up trying to bring her son to Shenzhen. Lin's son stayed in rural Anhui with his

⁴⁰ Due to the Covid-19 situation, Zhenzhen had to give up her travel plans to do IVF in Thailand and restarted the whole process with a private Chinese ART company.

grandparents. When I sat with Mo in a café waiting for Lin to finish her work, Mo told me that she was satisfied with Lin's decision, as it showed that Lin prioritised her feelings rather than those of other kin relatives.

For my friend-informants and many other Chinese queer couples, the difference between 'my children' and 'my partner's children (and therefore not my children)' was unquestionably understood through the conception of '*xueyuan guanxi*/blood tie'. In addition to legal uncertainty, a central question to be negotiated among queer couples was: would my families of origin accept this child as my/our offspring? Against this backdrop, one's parenthood was unquestioned when using own eggs/sperm. Yet, such distinctions, based on the notions of blood and biology, makes it problematic for a single/divorced queer parent to seek and maintain same-sex conjugal relationships, whether intentionally or unintentionally. We mustn't ignore the existing legal implications of queer intimacies and parenthood in China which interact with the notion of blood, as the child can be legally bonded to only one mother and one father. The conceptions of biology/blood and family line, together with the legal implications of joint parentage/custody, have shaped the distinction between 'my own children' and 'my partner's children' and created challenges for queer individuals to balance their kinship roles as children, parents, and partners. As these child-related issues have been increasingly discernible in queer communities, queer couples attempted to identify suitable strategies for achieving joint parenthood, so they could strengthen their relationships instead of weakening them.

'Our Children'

During a get-together dinner, I had the following conversation with Wen, a 34-year-old lesbian who was planning to have a child:

Me: "I had dinner with a lesbian couple Xie and Hong last weekend. They have a lovely baby boy whose nickname is Doudou."

Wen: "I am so jealous that they have children together. It would be the best way. Are they a T-P couple?"

Me: "Yes, Xie is T and Hong is P."

Wen: "Do their parents accept them? Doudou is Xie's son, right? Do Hong's parents acknowledge Doudou as their grandson?"

Me: "No, Doudou is Hong's biological son. They used Hong's egg. Hong got pregnant via IUI (Intrauterine insemination) directly."

Wen: “Doudou and Xie are not blood ties?”

Me: “The sperm they used was from Xie’s brother.”

Wen: “Oh, that also works.”

When I mentioned that Xie and Hong have a son, Wen immediately assumed their son was biologically linked to Xie (the T) and was given birth to by Hong (the P). This process was commonly referred to as *A luan B huai*. Otherwise, Wen wouldn’t think the baby was *their* son. The confusion raised in our conversation indicated the ambiguous link between blood ties and parenthood in today’s queer world. Is there a universal signifier that marks the shift from ‘my own/partner’s children’ to ‘our children’ for Chinese queer couples?

As revealed earlier, *A luan B huai* has emerged as a popular strategy among lesbian couples to have children together since the 2010s. Made possible by IVF-EF technology, *A luan B huai* enables a woman to conceive a baby with the egg from her same-sex lover. During the last few years, numerous Chinese queer women I have met in person and online have endorsed *A luan B huai* as the ideal strategy to ‘solve all problems’ including having offspring and establishing *jiban* (mutual bonds) with same-sex partners. Danny and Pam, a couple who chose *A luan B huai* as their most desirable path to joint parenthood, decided to use Danny’s eggs to have children. Pam, who was due to give birth in 2020 at the time of my fieldwork, once said, “imagine a baby comes from my body and looks like Danny, isn’t that wonderful?” In other words, Pam felt she was connected to the baby as she was the one who bore them. Instead of emphasising biology, they employed the notion of ‘bodily experience’ to validate such mutual connections. In this way, they also naturalised Pam’s motherhood with the Chinese adjective *qinsheng*. Literally meaning giving birth by oneself, *qinsheng* was normally used to refer to one’s own children/parents. With reciprocal IVF, Pam gave birth to the baby and describe it as *qinsheng*, therefore the baby as her own, blurring gestational/biological motherhood.

Also, Danny and Pam had made plans to ‘explain’ where the baby was from to their parents. After their child was born, they would be legally registered as Pam’s child. Pam’s parents already knew about their daughter being with a woman, and Pam was confident that her parents would be satisfied to see her being recognised by others as a single mother rather than a childless lesbian. On the other hand, Danny was in a *xinghun* marriage, but she planned to divorce her *xinghun* husband and come out to her parents once the baby was born, so she could tell her parents that she had a child and had fulfilled her familial

duty. According to Danny and Pam, no one would be hurt in this way. They bought sperm from a private ART company instead of using sperm from Danny's *xinghun* husband. Danny was of the opinion that they mustn't raise children with her *xinghun* partner, or their children would have too many parents and grandparents involved.

At the same time, some respondents worried about the potentially unequal positions involved in A *luan* B *huai* childrearing. A *luan* B *huai* is sometimes called T *luan* P *huai*, since person A (biological mother) is usually a self-identified T, and person B (gestational mother) is usually a P and was more economically dependent in their relationship. People who were against the practice of A *luan* B *huai* argued that person B, who gave birth to the baby, was no more than a surrogate being exploited by person A. To support their opinion, they shared stories of their (web) friends, who were usually P and had given birth to their T girlfriends' biological children, eventually losing both their house and custody of children after breaking up with said girlfriends. In these stories, the key point was always who the baby was legally registered with. In the case of A *luan* B *huai*, it is possible to either register person A⁴¹ or person B as the child's legal mother, but not both. Based on my observation in field sites and online platforms, most queer women believed it was unfair to register the child's legal identification with person A, as person B would have neither biological nor legal connections with the child. In this sense, the language of 'body/bodily experience', or constructing motherhood through pregnancy and as *qinsheng*, might be made effective or invalid by legal practice.

Like Zhenzhen, Xie (previously mentioned in chapter 3&4) emphasised the vital role of biological connection in authenticating one's parenthood. Furthermore, Xie was conscious of the significance of establishing socially recognisable joint parenthood with Hong. Xie had already had a son from a previous heterosexual marriage, while Hong had no offspring. Xie prevented Hong from having children through entering a *xinghun* marriage as she warned other lesbian couples, "having children with the *xinghun* partner means you two are bonded for a lifetime!"

Xie and other respondents acknowledge that co-parenting relationships in *xinghun* marriages could profoundly impact their same-sex intimate relationships and make same-

⁴¹ Although person A doesn't give birth to the child, she may do the DNA test to obtain a parent-child relationship certificate.

sex co-parenting extremely difficult. Ei's experience resonates with Xie's statement. As a result, Xie and Hong decided to use Xie's brother's sperm since Xie wanted the child to be her blood as well. "Don't think of yourself as a great person", Xie said. In other words, Xie was not confident that she could treat a child as her own who was not her *xueyuan*/blood. Xie's brother, who lived in Hunan, agreed to help them. Since Xie was an experienced nurse, they did IUI in a hotel room. In 2018, Hong gave birth to a baby boy and registered as the child's legal mother. The procedure of single mother registering the baby "couldn't be easier" in Shenzhen, according to their experience. For Xie and Hong, no matter who the baby was registered with, the baby was 'their' child and their *xueyuan*/blood. Both Xie and Hong's parents went to see their offspring and slowly acquiesced in their cohabitating relationship. When Hong and Xie shared their experience with me and another lesbian couple, the younger couple immediately started discussing which male family relative they could 'borrow' for having children. The most secure solution, as regarded by the lesbian couple, was to make sure the child was tied by blood to both, therefore eliminating risks caused by legal ambiguity.

This idea of 'borrowed fertility from a relative' is not unique and happened among several other queer couples I met. What seems to be happening here is that one form of kinship is being used to establish another; in this case, a brother is a way of producing a mother, and in a way this also reverses the roles and blood ties of uncle, aunt, and father. In this sense, these queer couples not only construct their co-parenthood around the central position of the blood tie, but also mobilise the idea of blood and kinship terminology.

Making sure the children are biologically linked to both people in a gay couple has been somehow made possible by IVF-EF technology as well. Min and his boyfriend had two babies through surrogacy using both their sperm and an egg from the same egg donor. As a result, their twins would be blood brothers with different fathers but the same mother. By this means, Min and his partner have two sons together. Both of their parents were satisfied and visited their flat several times a year. Some gay respondents, on the other hand, pointed out that raising one child was already expensive.

The question being elicited here is: is this strategy which is made possible by ART the only solution to constructing mutual parenthood for a same-sex couple? By exploring the use of emerging ART, which are seen as both enabling and interfering with nature,

Strathern (1992a) blurs the boundaries between nature and technology and points out the very ground for nature to be seen as a distinct domain from culture has become questionable as nature needs to be protected by technology. Hayden's research (1995) on lesbian mothers has suggested that biology is mobilised from a singular category to various meanings and biology itself is no longer a self-evident symbol. Their research findings from Western societies indeed brought insights for this research. Here I link the Confucian conception of the family line with the discussion of queer parenthood in Chinese society. How was the social parenthood described by Strathern (1992a&b) being anticipated by Chinese non-heterosexual people in the era of ART? The emerging practices of IVF and surrogacy among same-sex couples in urban China and the issues raised by these practices have suggested that the distinction between biological parenthood and social parenthood were interpreted and made explicit not only by queer individuals themselves, but also by their families of origin and the wider society. In this context, Chinese non-heterosexual people's practice of single and co-parenting should not be understood without realising the symbolic patrilineal tradition of family lines.

"If my encounter with Joe is our destiny, the arrival of Jack is a gift from God". This is quoted from Tommy's blog 'Three men under one roof (*sannanyizhai*)', through which he has been sharing his life with his partner Joe and their son Jack since 2005. As a journalist who writes both accessibly and exquisitely, Tommy's 'Three men under one roof' has received lots of attention, and his family is frequently being referred to as the 'Chinese version of the *tongzhi* family' by journal reporters and queer activists in China. During our first meeting, Tommy's mobile phone screen lit up and he pointed out the wallpaper of his phone to me: "look, my son Jack".

Tommy never hides the fact that he and Jack are not biologically related. Tommy's partner Joe is Jack's biological father and legal guardian. Joe's ex-wife gave birth to Jack before Joe divorced her and moved in with Tommy. It was obvious from Tommy's blog and from his words during our interview that he treated Jack as 'our child' rather than 'my partner's child'. When Jack turned two years old, Tommy and Joe brought Jack to Guangzhou and started to live together. Tommy emphasised many times that it was holding little Jack in his arms that gave him the feeling of family. Jack always calls Joe 'Baba (dad)' and Tommy 'Daddy' inside and outside the home. Tommy has been the major breadwinner for the family, and Joe works as a househusband (*jiating zhufu*).

Though Tommy worked in Yunnan and Thailand for years, he was proud to tell me that he never missed important moments as Jack grew up. In every parent meeting in school, Tommy came as Jack's godfather and Joe came as his father. The teachers and other parents never asked anything. "It feels very natural", said Tommy.

Tommy and Joe came out to Jack when Jack was 11. Tommy described this in his blog as one of the most important days in his life. When he finished work and came back home, Jack opened the door and asked him, "Daddy, are you *tongxinglian* (homosexual)?" Tommy suddenly froze and didn't know how to respond. Jack laughed, "Dad told me you are both homosexual. He told me you love him very much, don't you?" Tommy saw Joe surfing the net and Jack holding his PSP gaming console; everything seemed smooth. He smiled and answered, "Yes, I love your dad, and I love you too. Tell me what you want for your birthday?" Joe stopped Tommy and said, "don't bribe Jack. He is fine." Tommy advised that other gay fathers ought to come out to their children when they were 8 to 10 years old, as he reasoned, "If they are younger, they may not understand what their father is saying; if they are older, they may already hear homophobic statements in school." Tommy joked that his son had a big heart and perhaps too big and that Jack told his girlfriend in high school about his family.

Tommy used his personal experience to tell other gay men that affective bonds are as important as blood relationships. The three of them have been living together since Jack was 2 years old, and Jack treats both as his father. It should be noted that Tommy was never Jack's legal guardian or adoptive father. Tommy has spent more than 15 years trying to make his parents accept his relationship with Joe and Jack. After Tommy's father passed away, Tommy's distant relatives in his hometown continued to curse him for "not getting married and having offspring". Jack accompanied Tommy to the farewell ceremony and the following family dinner, when one of Tommy's uncles questioned, "He (Jack) is not your blood, can you put his name on your father's gravestone?" Eventually, Joe and Tommy decided to put Jack's name on Tommy's father's gravestone, prefixed with 'grandson'.

When Jack was going to the United States in 2018 for a college exchange program, Tommy said he encountered a problem that he never thought about before preparing for the F-1 visa. As a college student who didn't have an income, Jack needed to submit his

parents' financial statement. However, Jack's biological and legal father Joe didn't have a stable income and the property certificate to prove that he was able to afford Jack's tuition and living costs overseas. Tommy said:

"If I were the one to provide the financial statement, it would be so much easier. I have held an executive position in a private company and have satisfactory bank statements and property certificates. But how can I prove my relationship with Jack? Jack's teachers and my colleagues all know my family. Jack has called me 'Daddy' for 18 years. We believe we have been doing fine just like other families even we don't have a marriage certificate. Nevertheless, this little legal certificate suddenly becomes necessary."

Unlike adoptive parenthood, Tommy's status as Jack's father was not recognised by the law and thus created difficulties that were more powerful than their neighbours and schoolteachers. Tommy actively used his influence as a journalist and his financial capability to deal with most troubles he encountered. After his father's funeral, Tommy never came back to meet his distant relatives from his hometown. Eventually, Jack's F-1 Visa application passed fine with Joe's financial statement, but left Tommy and fellow gay fathers worried. What else could happen if they failed to prove their parental status to officials? For most people, the troubles Tommy and Joe have encountered seemed to be insurmountable without adequate resources, thus making such queer 'social parenthood' unprotected and vulnerable. In this sense, Tommy's parenting practices were often seen by non-heterosexual people like Xie as selfless behaviour while not desirable. Tommy didn't feel he was doing a selfless deed, as he stated that having Jack as their son made his connection with Joe long-lasting. If Tommy didn't treat Jack as a 'our child', he wouldn't have a mutual life goal and eventually wouldn't establish deep *jiban*/mutuality with Joe. Tommy has been managing several WeChat groups with nearly 200 members calling themselves gay fathers. As Tommy mentioned, the number of gay fathers has been steadily rising as more and more gay men became aware of ART.

In short, the ethnographic accounts imply that the notion of biology/blood tie plays a central role in the construction of parenthood for Chinese non-heterosexual people, while it was not essentially fixed or interpretable. Rather, it can be mobilised to create the feeling of *jiban* (mutual bond) and joint parenthood among same-sex couples with the assistance of ART. In other words, the queer parents in my research didn't construct

lesbian/gay parenthood through all-out distinction from the centrality in biology and blood ties. When a queer parent was already in a co-parenting relationship with an opposite-sex partner, it became particularly challenging to maintain lasting relationships with same-sex lovers as romantic relationships were distinct from essential family members. My respondents' narratives reveal that they may or may not be the 'co-mother/father', 'second-mother/father', or 'chosen father/mother' of their partner's biological child. At the same time, same-sex co-parenting practices raised further debates about the unequal division of work in T-P/1-0 co-parenting relationships, as the housewife/househusband role in same-sex relationships was not protected by law, and therefore the person in this role was at higher risk of losing custody. Against this backdrop, many Chinese same-sex couples desired legal marriage and joint custody as protection and security against risks. As Xie and Hong and other same-sex couples have realised, parents of non-heterosexual people may slowly and silently accept their children's same-sex cohabiting relationships without necessarily acknowledging their same-sex desires, especially after knowing they have grandchildren. The grandchild played a vital role, making the same-sex couple into co-parents and making the grandparent-grandchild bond recognisable. Therefore, same-sex couples may strategically utilise the family line's symbolic importance to make their natal families accept their same-sex partner as a family member that was similar to son/daughter-in-law.

The dynamic interrelations between same-sex intimate relationships and queer co-parenting practices elicit questions about the elasticity of kinship in today's urban China. The personal experience of my friend-respondents successfully achieving co-parenting relationships and thus tightening their conjugal intimacy have demonstrated the possibility of mobilising the dominant centrality in biology and the Confucian conception of family ties. The centrality in blood ties alone didn't work to achieve or destroy queer co-parenting relationships; rather, it was their capability to eliminate the involvement of a third biological or legal parent outside their queer conjugal relationship, to negotiate the uncertainties caused by the legal terms of custody, and to handle their parents' attitude toward their co-parenting relationships. One's gender, social status, financial ability, age, and distance from families of origin all come into play. The fact that Xie and Hong are always able to take their little son Doudou to hang out with other lesbians reinforced their co-parenting status and closeness that is recognisable in queer communities. As queer parents and their parents attempted to define the boundary between kinship and non-

kinship relations through a social/biological distinction, the existence of such boundary became an oxymoron. The recognition of biological ties and chosen ties is further voiced in the use of the language of love and care in queer intimate and familial lives.

“Children will accept us if they feel enough care and love”

“Daddy, I am willing to give you all my pocket money; you can take it from my drawer without asking me.”

Bei, a gay man in his 40s, told every queer participant in a meetup that his 5-year-old son said this to him the other day when he joked that he had no money to buy sustenance for the family. Bei started living with his partner 13 years ago, and they adopted the second child of his partner’s brother as their son. In other words, Bei’s partner was the child’s *shushu* (uncle) in conventional Chinese kinship terminology. Unlike Tian’s ex-boyfriend, Bei had always wanted a son, and he felt connected to the baby boy when he saw him the first time. Thus, Bei’s partner *guoji* adopted the boy from his brother, who felt overwhelmed by raising two sons. Bei was touched by his son’s generosity and thought his son learned from him to express his affection. For Bei, his son showed him love and care through the will to give him his pocket money. Moreover, Bei knew that his son recognised him as a warm father from daily conversations like the one above. Because of that, Bei was positive about their son’s attitude toward having two fathers. Bei’s parenting experience again echoes Tommy’s argument on the importance of affective bonds. What intrigued me in the narrative was their expression of affection and its material underpinning.

In this research, every respondent with children has indicated that love for children is the most important thing for one to qualify as a decent parent. In the meantime, the most frequent topics being brought out in interviews and daily conversations on parenting were companionship and education.

Tian and his friends visited several Pride parades in Europe last year. On the last night of the trip, a middle-aged gay father cried during their talks and Tian was touched:

“This gay man is my *laoxiang* (person from one’s fellow town). He got married and had a child before knowing he was gay. He told us that he felt sorry for his grown-up child. His child never left Hunan until college. Think about it. His child must have faced a lot of discrimination growing up in that small town. I felt for him.”

After hearing his *laoxiang*'s story, Tian decided that he wouldn't let his child Xiaoyu grow up in a small town. Tian planned to get Xiaoyu into the private international school in Dongguan, which didn't require Dongguan *hukou* (residence), while being far more expensive than public school. Tian asked me many questions as he couldn't decide whether to send his son to a private boarding school or a day school. During a talking session, Tian mentioned that his son Xiaoyu was diagnosed with autism 2 years ago. He immediately took Xiaoyu to seek treatment. Tian took Xiaoyu to the same doctor recently, and the doctor said his 6-year-old son was 'normal' with no sign of autism. Tian emphasised that love and companionship were the most important thing for a child to grow up happily. He said, "some heterosexual couples don't spend enough time with their children. The left-behind children (*liushou ertong*) are poor."

Each weekend, Tian took Xiaoyu to meet other gay and lesbian parents and their children for hiking, picnics, or casual gatherings at each other's houses. Tian explained to me that he and other parents were intentionally doing it for their children. "Because I am a man, I want Xiaoyu to grow up with some women like his mom's role in his life. I collaborate with a lesbian mom very well". Just like Tian, other queer parents who were willing to participate in my studies were confident that they "are doing better than the heterosexual parents" by showing other people the (material) resources and 'healthy' childhood experience they have provided for their children.

An stressed in the interview that he and Ye would never hesitate to spend for their sons. After their three mixed-race children were born, they hired several babysitters and each of them stayed at home for half of the year. Also, An's mother moved to Shenzhen to babysit her grandsons and lived with them since then. An never explicitly came out to his mother, who didn't say anything about their cohabitating status. An's mother and Ye get along fine as they often go to the local food market together. The children call Ye "ABi", since they couldn't pronounce "*Babi* (an alternative of Daddy)". Ye spent a lot more time playing with their sons, while An was not so patient with the children. One day, the kids came back home and suddenly called Ye 'mom'; An and Ye explained to their sons that their mom is in Germany and they may see her when they grow up. An and Ye's three sons were going to an international kindergarten and taking weekly interest classes. An planned to send three sons to the Harrow International Boarding School in Hong Kong, which he believed to be an exclusive school for the elite class.

Chen and her girlfriend Liu's 4-year-old children were attending a bilingual kindergarten as well. After hearing my educational background, Chen often mentioned her philosophy towards child education:

“Whenever my children have vacations, Liu or I take them travelling. They have been to many places so far. Last summer, my partner took them on a road trip to Tibet. This year they went to Japan. We don't think it is too early to take them to the Himalaya Mountains. They learn a lot from travelling. We want to provide them with the best we can.”

Chen also told me that their home was decorated like an amusement park. Liu filled the entire second floor of their house with numerous toys. They had added a small swimming pool in their bathroom.

“My children's kindergarten classmates love our house! The moment they entered our living room, they usually ask my children, ‘is it really your home? you are living in a fairyland!’ When they left our house, they always asked if they could come back again. Some kids even told their partners to make their house like ours.”

Chen was proud that other kids admired her children's home. Chen and Liu were planning to move to a larger house as they thought they would soon need a larger swimming pool at home. Although Chen and Liu never explicitly mentioned their relationship to other parents at kindergarten, the parents, according to Chen, were *gao suzhi* (high-quality) and smart enough that they never asked ‘embarrassing questions’ about their intimate relationship or let their kids do so.

It is worth re-mentioning the trend among queer parents for choosing Euro-American egg/sperm donors to have mixed-race babies. When I first met Chen, she felt that such a choice could possibly hurt the child because people might get curious and gossip about the child's biological parents. Still, Chen frequently encountered young gay and lesbian clients who wanted mixed-race children. A year later, Chen changed her opinion and had a little mixed-race daughter. In urban China, a Euro-Asian mixed-race appearance was always related to positive descriptions like good-looking (*gao yanzhi*) and high-class (*gaoji*). Against this background, giving children a Euro-Asian mixed-race appearance also means giving them a better looking, and thus a better future.

Tian, An, and Chen have arguably endorsed and followed similar good parenting models promoted by the mass media and consumer culture. Lin (2019) examines the relationship between children, family, and the education consumer market under the dual background of market reform and family transformation in urban China. Lin and Li (2011, see also Xie 2013) identify a trend toward the nuclear family characterised by two parents and an only child. Families with an only child have exhibited children-oriented consumption, spending more money on the child rather than the adults in the household (Yin 2003). Chinese parents see fulfilling children's material desires as an approach to purchasing happiness for them and expressing parental love (Fong 2004, Lin 2019). After the only-child generation became parents themselves, their consumer behaviours continued to affect how they treated their children. The consumption market for children has expanded and is not limited to dietary supplements, toys, clothing, and education. On the other hand, investments in children's education have been closely linked to the desire for intergenerational class mobility (ibid).

Besides providing material and educational resources, it has become a crucial aspect in queer parents' lives to construct a loving family atmosphere for their children. As many of my respondents clarified, children could still receive enough parental love even though they didn't grow up in a 'whole' family. Their personal experiences with their families of origin also inevitably shaped their conception of what constituted a good family.

When Xie heard about my research, she said she was surveying T's relations with parents and concluded none of her T-identified friends felt parental love from their fathers. I then realised that the criterion of 'love' for Xie was closely associated with material resources and gender relations. Xie was born in 1975 during the period of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. According to Xie, her mother was from a *dizhu jiating* (literally meaning landlord family, which was the target of violent denunciation campaigns). To erase the capitalist background for herself and her offspring, Xie's mother married a farmer with a 'clean (farmer) background' and had a son and a daughter. Her father only valued the male child and never listened to Xie's requests. Xie once said:

“No matter what form of a family is, love is what the kid needs most. My family is complete with a mom and a dad, but I didn't feel love growing up. My parents prefer men over women. As women, we couldn't have meals at the table. I never received the same amount of care as the men growing up in that family.”

When Xie graduated from junior high school, she went to nursing school although her father could have afforded to send her to a public high school which might have led to better career opportunities. Xie's father ignored Xie's complaints and later persuaded her to enter marriage. Years after leaving her family of origin and hometown, Xie has been doing business and started enjoying a well-off life. Xie supposed she had the braveness to leave her previous heterosexual marriage, come out to her parents, and gain economic independence partly because of her T role and masculine style (T role was widely believed to be more independent and have more personal agency). Still, Xie was not satisfied with her educational background as she knew she could do better if she went to college. During a get-together, she said to me and another lesbian couple in their early 30s, "You can't do anything without education nowadays. We are going to provide our children with the finest educational resources we can."

Xie's accounts reveal the generational changes around the conception of parental love and care. Scholars agree that the conception and forms of family and marriage have changed enormously under social changes in rural and urban China (e.g., Riley 1994, Pimentel 2000, Li 2011, Tang & Chen 2012, Xie 2013). Cohen (2005) points out that the de-collectivization of interests has caused rural families to lose much of their economic autonomy, while family (*jia*) remains an essential social unit. The traditional disadvantaged positions, women and youth, have gained increased individual freedom. The shifting control over marital decision from parents to youth was promoted by the Communist Party of China through the introduction of the Marriage Act of 1950 (and 1980) and through encouraging women into the job market (Pimentel 2000). The average age of the first marriage and divorce rate has risen since then. It is necessary to recall that the idea of love cannot be taken for granted as 'actual' events; rather, it is a discursive discourse (Povinelli 2006). The rise of 'romantic/free love' and the rejection of arranged marriage in the last century are closely linked to the sense of modernity, freedom, and individual autonomy (Yan 2003, Lee 2006, Pan 2015). The relationship between romantic love and filial piety "became an important site on which new modes of subjectivity and sociality were worked out" (Lee 2006: 16). Again, the changing attitudes towards the 'complete' family didn't happen inside the queer community, but in wider society under family and marriage transformation. As the national divorce rate continues to climb and marriage rates continue to decline, the conventional obligation of establishing and

maintaining a complete family with two opposite-sex parents and children has been called into question.

Being raised in a rural family that treated her as someone who didn't merit material investment, Xie felt disappointed and eventually cut her parents out so she could pursue her own desired life. Xie made it clear that having a complete natal family with a mother and a father didn't mean the family provided good quality of care for children. Xie's opinion resonates with the younger generations, who have shown a growing rejection of simple-minded filial piety (*yuxiao*) and an endorsement of mutual respect and equal relations between parents and children (See also Li 2011). In this sense, reciprocity in parent-child relation is emphasised: only if you love your children and care for them as they grow up, are you a good parent who can enjoy their love and care in return. Xie and Hong talked with other lesbian mothers about coming out to their children and were confident that their children would accept their same-sex relationship when they felt enough love and care. Just like Chen said, she once joked with their children, asking them if they wanted a father to replace her. "The kids cried and yelled 'no' to me and Liu," Chen confessed, "I immediately regret my words but feel happy in the meantime."

The rhetoric of chosen families and love leads us again to evaluate the notion of individuality and choice. Although Tommy, Chen, Min, Xie and An never detailed their income to me, owning several housing properties in first-tier cities like Shenzhen undoubtedly placed them in the upper-middle classes. They were living in well-managed neighbourhoods, usually located near elite elementary schools. One cannot neglect the material underpinning of their alleged higher-than-standard parenting choices. As Povinelli puts it, the choice is perceived as if it is the "only real choice available to us" made between these discourses of individual freedom and social constraint in our everyday life (2006:6). This argument resonates with Strathern's discussion on individuality. The individual person, as Strathern explains, exercises choices as they do style, while their motivations are neither private nor public (1992a:166) and style itself is "an imitative act" (177). In this sense, choice has become "naturalised by the aesthetic and constraints by consumer culture" (1992a:162). What my respondents meant by "being a good parent and giving children the best life" could be explicated in a similar manner: protecting their children by avoiding 'low-quality (*suzhi*)' homophobic neighbours and

schoolteachers, giving them the most comfortable living arrangements, providing them with the best educational resources, and spending quality leisure time with them.

Consequently, saving money and purchasing housing property in a tolerant neighbourhood have become essential steps for becoming a reliable parent, queer and straight alike. Even for young non-heterosexual people like Claire and Zhao who didn't want kids at all, these steps were desirable for maintaining a lasting same-sex relationship and having a better chance of being accepted by their parents. Hence, non-heterosexual people's choices to move to cosmopolitan, open-minded cities for upward mobility are closely linked with the existing practices of love and care and their visions of a desirable future.

Conclusion: Blood Ties and Queer Relations

Overall, this chapter reveals the complexity in defining the boundaries between kin and non-kin, biological ties and chosen ties. As the division of biological and social facts appeared in the discussion of kinship, it has firstly become clear to anthropologists that kinship is not reducible to biology. At the same time, scholars have pointed out that kinship is a lumpy, contagious connection, and is not always positive in the sense of bringing warmth to its members (Das 1995, Carsten 2013, Meinert & Grøn 2019). For queer parents who shared their life experiences in this chapter, blood ties and affective bonds seem to sometimes be threatening and sometimes reinforcing each other's positions. First of all, my respondents in this chapter expressed incompatible views on the issue of alleged biological, legal and social parenthood. Ei and many other queer parents conceptualised blood ties as the most central and authentic form of kin relations, and they tended to view non-heterosexual conjugal relations and non-biological parent-child relations as non-kin or 'less-kin' relations. The young urbanites, on the other hand, highlighted the central position of conjugal love in their kinship value system in comparison with the traditional patrilineal parent-child relation.

As described above, most non-heterosexual people perceived their same-sex lovers' children as non-relatives not solely because they were not blood relatives; rather, their decisions to participate in childrearing with their same-sex partners were shaped by various social factors and private interests. Here, legal recognition plays a significant role in their understanding of parenthood, as a queer individual couldn't establish a legally

recognisable tie with the biological child of their same-sex partner through marriage, and hence they could only count on affective bonds (with their lover and their lover's children). In other words, social parenthood in queer life-worlds could hardly equal legally recognisable parenthood like adoptive parenthood or step-parenthood in heterosexual households, and even the idea of social parenthood became questionable for many non-heterosexual people. What Ei and other non-heterosexual people often stated was the alleged irreversibility of consanguineal relations and reversibility of affinal relationships. Like Simpson (1994:837) suggests, the history of divorce in Euro-American society is a history of the growing reversibility of affinal relationships. One might be an ex-husband, but not an ex-father. In this sense, the high reversibility of Chinese same-sex conjugal relationships is especially problematic since they don't go through legal marriages and divorces. Just like the lawyer speaker in a non-profit workshop said, "non-heterosexual couples don't even qualify as *feifa tongju* (illegal cohabitation) in legal terms". With neither a marriage certificate nor joint ownership, Ei's ex-girlfriend and Ei might end their intimate relationship in a flash, but they couldn't cut their relations with their biological children easily. In Ei's case, she found out she might cut out relations with her ex completely, but she might never cut her relationship with her *xinghun* partner/ ex-husband, who is the other biological parent of her children. For this reason, co-parenting in *xinghun* marriages might form durable mutual bonds between the lesbian 'wife/mother' and the gay 'husband/father' with gendered roles, whether they expected it or not. Some non-heterosexual people therefore argued that biological parent-child relations are stronger than same-sex intimate relationships. Yet, we must acknowledge that the belief that "blood is thicker than water" is configured by existing marriage and adoption laws in this context.

To discuss this matter further, I suggest that establishing parent-child relations with the biological child of one's queer partner can be seen as a non-heteronormative/queer relationship, as the person has no biological or legal bond with the child. Queer relations rely on affective recognition as the other two perceived authoritative recognitions – blood and law – are absent. The very uncertainty between state legislation and queer kinship shapes non-heterosexual people's perceived nature of queer relations, including queer conjugal relations and queer non-biological parenthood (Borneman 1997, Goodfellow 2015). Moreover, non-heterosexual people's natal families rarely acknowledged their queer lovers' children as their offspring that worth investment. Consequently, some queer

parents had to make tough choices between their blood kins and their chosen tie. Ei chose her blood relations over her girlfriend, and Lin chose to live with her same-sex lover instead of her son. In an extreme circumstance, Xie left her natal family and her biological child in her hometown to chase upward mobility and romantic relationships in a modern city.

It appears that Tommy held a view on queer parenting quite contrary to Ei who embraced seemingly conventional kinship values; Tommy's life choice to be an openly gay father of a child not biologically linked with himself was more modern and radically innovative. Although Tommy was aware that he might never be legally recognised as Jack's father, he chose to co-parent with his same-sex partner Joe. Tommy's parental status and his relations with Joe and Jack were acknowledged by his friends and colleagues in their everyday life with several prerequisites. The biological mother of Jack already divorced Joe and didn't request custody of Jack. Moreover, Tommy's job as a journalist and his considerable income level in a big city allowed him to express his queerness in a relatively free manner. Yet, Tommy had to negotiate with the uncertainties of his father status caused by the legalities of custody, and to handle his distant relatives' attitudes toward his same-sex co-parenting relationships. In this way, Tommy's statement that the "affective bond was as important as the blood relationship" is also shaped by legal concerns, conventional patrilineal family norms, and material resources.

Against this background, using ART without entering any form of heterosexual relationships has emerged as the seemingly ideal way for queer couples to become co-parents, mostly because these practices cause less legal risk about parenthood in their eyes. Like many of my respondents explained, there would be no fighting for custody with an opposite-sex *zhìhun/xínghun* partner. In the case of A *luan* B *huai* (reciprocal IVF) among lesbian couples and surrogacy among gay couples, the position of biological relatedness was often put together with the role of bodily experience and affective bond in constructing the couple's co-parenthood. Some respondents chose to have two children or use the sperm/egg of their partners' opposite-sex relatives to make sure that their children were biologically related to both. Either way, the success or failure in achieving queer couples' co-parenting status in their everyday life unsettle the notions of blood and biogenetic, making them contingent features (Hayden 1995).

Finally, queer parents' reflective narratives in this chapter reveal the generational changes in conceptions of parental love and care. Developed from the previous chapters, I suggest that both the expression of parental love and conjugal love were conditioned by one's material resources. At the same time, the changing understanding of love and care signifies transforming Chinese kinship values. I suggest that the idea of blood and biology still holds its centrality in Chinese family life, while it is also proved to have elastic potentialities for queer couples who want to establish joint parenthood. The emerging use of ART and the disputes raised by the alleged distinction between biological and social parenthood for queer couples stresses the very uncertainty of queer parenthood and kinship that coexists with the ambiguity of state law and everyday heteronormative family norms in Chinese society. The notions of biology and patrilineal continuity line alone didn't work to achieve or destroy the queer co-parenting relationship; rather, it was the queer subject's capacity to eliminate the involvement of a third biological or legal parent outside their intimate relationship, to negotiate with the uncertainties caused by the legal terms of custody, to secure educational and housing resources in big cities, and to gain parental acceptance. The various arrangements of parenting and co-parenting practices demonstrate the mobilising possibilities beyond 'blood' kin ties, that is, (co-)parenthood being constructed and strengthened using the language of bodily experience and affective recognition.

Chapter 7 The Chinese Version of the ‘Rainbow Family’?

This chapter focuses on the changing understanding regarding the basis of a family in urban China in the context of social transformations. I am especially interested in how these changes interact with everyday practices of intimacy and parenting in Chinese queer life-worlds. Developed from the previous chapters, I document the various forms of non-heterosexual families I encountered during fieldwork, including people’s self-understandings of the (rainbow) family. LGBT/non-heterosexual families are often delineated through the language of ‘fictive/chosen families’ in contrast with ‘biological/blood’ families, and such discourse assumes that LGBT families are creative and innovative in their structure (Weston 1991, Dempsey 2010). In the meantime, the emerging research on LGBT families in non-Western societies as ‘families of choice’ has been challenging the dominant Western knowledge of queer kinship and coming-out politics (Mizielińska & Stasińska 2017, Lo 2020). In most Chinese social studies and queer communities, family/*jia* was always perceived as the most essential and powerful social unit that affected queer personal life (e.g., Chou 2001, Engebretsen 2009, Kam 2013, UNDP 2016). Huang and Brouwer thus suggest “the most profound struggle that Chinese queer subjects face is, hence, not in a ‘public,’ socio-political domain; instead, it is located in their ‘private’ lives – in the precarious, lasting negotiations with their intimate families, especially their parents” (2018:101). On the other hand, Hildebrandt (2018) reminds us to apply a social policy lens to family pressure felt by LGBT people in China as he examines the heteronormative features of the one-child policy and elder care reforms. In this sense, the ‘family pressure’ in research risks being reduced to parent-child relations, excluding the broader social context.

Against this backdrop, I investigate ‘family/*jia*’ for Chinese non-heterosexual people not only through its cultural meanings, but also through its socio-legal meanings. The cultural and legal meanings of family are not always the same. This research treats family as a contested field. I will explore how queer subjects perceive ‘fictive’/ ‘chosen’ families and families of origins in urban China. I do not intend to narrow down the definition of Chinese queer families as there is not only one model of these. Rather, in this chapter, I investigate how these forms of family are either recognised or denied in different times

and spaces. Through my ethnographic fieldwork and reflections, I complicate the normal-radical, visible-invisible, public-private dualities in Chinese queer relationships.

Coming Big Home, Coming Small Home

In the Shenzhen PFLAG talkfest 2018, the host asked everyone, “what is the best way to express ‘I love you’ in Chinese?” Then, she answered herself, “I think the Chinese version of ‘I love you’ is ‘my parents have approved us’”. Every time one asked the other the question “have you come out?”, they always meant coming out to families of origin especially gaining parental acceptance. Indeed, parent-child relations have been the most important relationships in Confucian Chinese society and still hold their significance in today’s China. Parents are still involved in spousal choice and married lives (Riley 1994, Pimentel 2000). The host’s speech in this PFLAG event demonstrates the strong wish for the coexistence of romantic love and parental harmony during the emergence of queer subjectivities. Moreover, the host’s discourse on parental acceptance echoes the indigenous “coming out as coming home” strategy (Chou 2001) which stresses harmonious negotiation between the Chinese kinship system and non-normative sexualities. For Chou, ‘*jia* (family/home)’ is culturally unique in the Chinese language as it also refers to the mental space one belongs to. On the other hand, some scholars (Wong 2007, Huang & Brouwer 2018, Wei 2020) point out that it would be culturally essentialist to view coming home and coming out strategies in a local/global binary, and that these are insufficient for Chinese non-heterosexual people in shifting contexts. After all, the changing notion of ‘family/*jia*’ has constantly interacted with queer life aspirations, as I will demonstrate below.

The month of Chinese New Year is always the peak time for passenger transport as most urban migrants leave the city for their hometown to reunite with their families. Celebrating the Spring Festival Eve with the whole family has been a nationwide tradition in China⁴². In other words, it is the most important family gathering of the year. In the days following the Spring Festival Eve, relatives began to visit each other. For those living in Shenzhen that was far from home, Spring Festival may be the only time to have face-to-face communication with their parents and extended families. Being an international student, I was hardly able to go back to China during Spring Festivals.

⁴² It is also a tradition that the married couple have the family reunion dinner with the husband’s parents on the Spring Festival Eve. This tradition has been questioned and challenged in recent years.

During the Chinese New Year Holiday of 2019, I came back to my hometown and met many relatives I hadn't seen for years. When an aunt asked me gently if I ever plan to have a boyfriend and get married at age 28, I suddenly realised how frustrating talking to distant relatives could be for youth, women, and non-heterosexual people. Spring Festival became the peak time for coming out, as many non-heterosexual people couldn't stand the intense marriage pressure from parents and relatives when they returned from migrant cities (Lin & Xu 2013).

In reality, my friends and respondents spend Chinese New Year in various ways. Queer couples who hadn't come out to parents often go back to their home alone as single persons. They described it to me as “*gehuigejia* (each to one's own home)”. Many non-heterosexual people in this research were in-betweens. Their parents might already know about their same-sex relationship status, but they either sidestepped it or refused to talk about it. Non-heterosexual people who have come out (such as Zhao) may go back to their hometowns with their lovers. Some of my friends living in Shenzhen didn't go back to their hometown during the Chinese New Year holiday. Instead, their parents went to Shenzhen and stayed for a few days. ‘Reverse reunion’ is becoming popular in first-tier cities like Shenzhen among young migrants. *China News* and other news websites have reported ‘reverse Spring Rush/ reverse reunion’ as the newfangled trend since 2018. The reason more and more young migrants choose not to go back to their hometowns seems obvious: the price for train/flight/coach tickets from migrant cities to other parts of China is much higher than the other way around, and it is easier for their parents to go to Shenzhen. Despite the obvious factor, young non-heterosexual people have more subtle reasons to stay in the city and more complicated experiences with their families of origin during Chinese New Year.

Alice and her girlfriend Fiona are from Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan Province. They met each other in college and their relationship was entering into its seventh year in 2019. They had been living in Shenzhen for three years. Both of their parents have noticed their conjugal relationship, showing neither approval nor fury. In 2018, Alice and Fiona each went back to their own parents' home in Chengdu during Spring Festival. Their relatives still asked them about their plans for marriage and other personal questions. Moreover, they assumed that working in Chengdu was better than working in Shenzhen and continued to persuade them to come back to live in Chengdu. Fiona was irritated and

talked back. In 2019, Fiona went back to her parents' home in Chengdu while Alice stayed in Shenzhen. This time, Alice told me she had a much better experience.

Several months before the holiday, Alice asked her parents if they want to visit her in Shenzhen because she didn't want to hear her relatives asking her about her work and relationship status anymore. To her surprise, Alice's parents responded positively. The day after Fiona flew back to Chengdu, Alice's parents arrived in Shenzhen. Alice let her parents stay in her rented apartment,

“At first, I was going to book a hotel room for mom and dad. Then, I realised they have figured out my relationship with Fiona anyway. What the big deal is they staying in our apartment and see Fiona's things! There is no need to cover up the fact that we are living together”.

Alice and her parents lived together in Shenzhen for 2 weeks and visited the city. Alice's parents had a great time and stopped asking Alice to go back to Chengdu. Alice told me she and her parents are all glad they had spent Chinese New Year together and, at the same time, far from other relatives:

“I had some chats with my mom and realised that she was not unhappy with my issues, but rather worried about confronting the relatives. She cares so much about how others think of us⁴³. Therefore, I am going to take her to travel next Spring Festival.”

Before this Spring Festival holiday, Alice spent years subtly mentioning her same-sex relationship to her parents. After that, she realised the key issue in her coming out was her uncles and aunts' traditional family values. In a large extended family, members from different age groups, social classes, and educational backgrounds could have dramatically conflicting values; however, they might feel morally obliged to show care for each other's personal life because they are linked by blood. Alice's unmarried status was a failure in some relatives' eyes, which made her mum anxious. Alice tried to distance her mum from her relatives and she was positive about her strategy. Alice and Fiona both held master's degrees and were able to secure satisfactory jobs in Shenzhen. After working in Shenzhen

⁴³ Alice and Fiona also mentioned that Alice's mother has two female friends who are a couple and have had a child together recently. Alice's mother certainly knows they are *lala* as she told Alice that the baby was born through reciprocal IVF using A's egg and B's uterus. Alice thinks it is also a reason that her mother changed attitude toward same-sex relationships.

for some years, Alice's mother began to take her words into account rather than her relatives. For Alice, her parents spending the Chinese New Year with only her, in a family of three, was a positive sign. Alice expressed her hope that she would settle in Shenzhen with Fiona, so their parents could come to Shenzhen and therefore be away from their relatives' gossip for good.

Fiona agreed with Alice and said she had an unpleasant holiday back in Chengdu:

"I had to give the younger relatives a lot of red pocket money, and the aunts and uncles drove me mad. One day, my aunt rebuked her husband when they were preparing dinner. I tried to ease the tension, while my aunt suddenly turned to me and said they would stop quarrelling if I got married! What's wrong with her?"

Fiona admitted that she had to be very aggressive and even mean to her relatives to make them stop bringing up such (private) topics:

"I have offended almost everyone. When they ask me how much my salary is, I ask them about their house loans. When they ask me when I will get married, I ask them when they will divorce."

Fiona's statement is the epitome of many young urbanites' attitudes toward annoying questions from distant relatives, queer and straight alike. Fiona also planned to spend the next Spring Festival somewhere else with only her parents. She believed that the 'reverse reunion' and travelling during Spring Festival would be the future:

"The reason why we are still going back to the hometown and having dinner with all the relatives is because the family elders want us to do so. The grandparents can't travel long distances and they are the only people who unite the big family. However, when the elders are gone, the big family (*da jia*) will disperse and only small families (*xiao jia*) remain."

In Fiona's words, the 'big family' refers to the Confucian patrilineal family, and the 'small family' refers to the nuclear family with one's parents included. It becomes clear that the increase of the 'reverse Spring Festival reunion' in urban cities reflects the changing understanding of 'family' and 'relative', and such changes have a nuanced influence on queer intimate and family relationships. In a family in which one's parents were close to a large number of kin relatives, coming out was tricky as one felt one's private life became a subject of moral judgement for all aunts and uncles. In this way, one's personal desires and intimate relationships were morally assessed by relatives.

Some respondents who chose to enter *xinghun* marriages told me that they had already come out to their parents; they still needed to marry to protect their parents' moral reputation (*mianzi*) in the 'big family'. In other words, their parents failed the 'big family' test if their offspring didn't embrace a heteronormative lifestyle. Fiona and Alice's experience reflect the increasingly perceptible distinction between the 'big family' and 'small family' in Chinese private life.

Since living in Shenzhen, I have found that a noticeable number of parents of young non-heterosexual people have begun to gather with only immediate family members during traditional family reunion events like Chinese New Year. In meeting with my peers, I often heard young people say that their parents used to be close with their cousins and felt obliged to help each other. Often, they lent money to their cousins or did business with them. After these relatives took advantage of their parents, their parents learned the lesson and distance themselves from relatives. These kinds of widely-spread narratives among young people also demonstrated that they didn't think blood relatedness or sharing the same male ancestor would automatically produce trusting relations. Most young Chinese urbanites didn't include their relatives in their scope of family anymore. According to some young non-heterosexual people, their parents also tended to 'escape' from relatives after discovering their children were queer since they didn't want their relatives to gossip about them.

In short, many respondents concluded that nowadays "the big family is becoming the small family (*dajia bian xiaojia*)". This was happening generally among Chinese young urbanites. Li (2011) points out the trend toward nuclear families in urban Chinese cities and argues that urban youth are becoming estranged from distant relatives. In other words, the nuclear family is becoming more important than the extended family under rapid social change and market reforms. The decrease in small-scale family cooperation and the emergence of the free labor market were crucial factors. Young queer couples might settle into a place away from parents and relatives and eliminate their shared interests. As Schroeder (2012) observes, being able to choose leisure activities and to choose who to spend free time with has become vital for exercising individual autonomy. What's more, relatives were no longer seen as part of one's family by young non-heterosexual people, especially if they didn't feel emotionally close with their relatives. Therefore, one was no longer morally obligated to always spend time with relatives and please them. In this case,

the importance of blood, or a common male ancestor, has decreased. Still, urban young non-heterosexual people in this research showed a noticeable dependence on their parents and desire for parental acceptance. Mizielińska and Stasińska (2017) point out the ‘sticky relations’ between LGBT people and their families of origin in a Polish context. Polish non-heterosexual families often can’t cut themselves off from their families of origins due to their emotional and material dependence on them. Rather, Polish LGBT people need support from their close relatives. Similar to Polish society, Chinese LGBT communities were relatively weak, and elder care was mainly a family duty. I suggest that, in the Chinese context, the parents and the children are psychologically and materially interdependent on each other, whereas the importance of relatives has weakened. In the cases of middle-aged gay fathers, such as Tian and An, their mothers left their hometown to live with their sons’ queer families and silently acknowledged their sons’ same-sex relationships. Many young non-heterosexual people therefore expressed a strong desire to gain enough resources to settle in a big city and facilitate their parents moving away from their relatives.

Furthermore, we mustn’t only focus on young non-heterosexual people solely as if they are the only social group undergoing transformations. In many cases here, parents of non-heterosexual people revised their kinship values and supported their children’s life choices. Moreover, they became their children’s spokespeople in the ‘big family’, and focused on their children’s well-being rather than their moral reputation in the Confucian patrilineal family. Many parents of non-heterosexual people therefore described their experience of acknowledging their children’s queer relationships as ‘coming out’ as well.

Rainbow Families as Role Models: The Dynamics of Gender, Sexualness, and Social Class

A rainbow family is generally defined as a same-sex or LGBTIQ+ parented family in Euro-American society and this term has lately been adopted by Asia-Pacific regions. Over the last few years, the terms ‘rainbow family (*caihong jiating*)’ and ‘rainbow baby (*caihong baobao*)’ have been increasingly mentioned in Chinese queer communities, principally by LGBT organisations, gay and lesbian bloggers, and private ART agencies. Chen’s HH company has been managing a WeChat public account named “Rainbow Studio”. Likewise, quite a few ART agencies offering IVF/surrogacy service packages in China or overseas started their WeChat public accounts named “(company name)

Rainbow Baby” from around 2015. They share positive news and useful information on LGBT rights and implicitly promote their ART services in the articles. With their successful clients, they have linked the use of ART with the definition of the ‘rainbow baby’ and more crucially, the desired future for a perfect same-sex family that could live openly in China.

At the PFLAG Changsha talkfest in 2019, the host asked the guest speaker Tian: “since you have a child, Xiaoyu, already, why do you want a rainbow baby (*caihong baobao*)?” As a gay-identified father of two children, Tian *guoji* adopted his older son Xiaoyu from his brother and had his little son via surrogacy. The PFLAG host referred to Tian’s second son, whom he had through surrogacy, as a ‘rainbow baby’. Tian didn’t address this question directly; instead, he acknowledged that he came out to his mother after his ‘rainbow baby’ was born. He felt his coming-out experience sounded like a fake one:

“My mom was not angry after I told her I was gay. She even started to speculate about my friends and said, ‘oh, is that guy who is very tall and muscular homosexual as well?’ I thought my mom would not sleep that night; it turned out I was the one who couldn’t sleep.”

Most attendees seemed unsurprised, as they supposed that Tian’s mother had no more reason to be angry about Tian’s same-sex desires. Tian had brought a biological and legally recognised offspring into the family and therefore fulfilled his familial duty as a son. Several implications arise here. Tian’s older son Xiaoyu was never called a ‘rainbow baby’ by others at these kind of events, which implied that the birth of Tian’s second child was innovative and different from normative reproductive relationships. Although Tian felt astonished and grateful that his mother accepted him quickly, most listeners tended to relate Tian’s successful coming-out experience to his parental status. As mentioned before, having offspring was often viewed as aiding one’s coming out to families of origin. How does this relate to the emerging forms of queer family in China?

The discussions on whether a family might call themselves a ‘rainbow family’ and their child a ‘rainbow baby’ in queer communities always involved an evaluation of one’s marriage and parenting practices. From my experience with my friend-respondents, ART agencies, and LGBT communities, it seemed only the babies born through a way that was free from association with heterosexual marriage and sexual intercourse belonged to the category of rainbow babies. Lesbian mothers and gay fathers were hesitant to refer to

their children from previous *zhihun* (heterosexual marriages with heterosexual-identified spouses) as rainbow babies. Also, queer parents in *xinghun* (gay-lesbian contract marriages) rarely referred to their co-parenting status with opposite-sex *xinghun* partners as a rainbow family, nor would they join such WeChat groups. In this sense, queer parents' past life histories were also taken into account. For instance, journalists generally called Tommy's family a 'Chinese Version of *Tongzhi* Family'. If Tommy's family stories demonstrate a type of gay family that resisted centralising biology, his college-age son Jack was yet not recognised as a rainbow baby and Tommy's family therefore didn't fit in to the strict definition of the rainbow family.

Not long after I discovered Tommy's 'Three men under one roof' blog, several lesbians recommended a well-known WeChat public account named "*Caihong Baobao* (Rainbow Babies)". This public account was created by a *lala* couple in 2015 who had mixed-race twin babies through the *A luan B huai* process overseas. The *lala* couple, owning a kindergarten themselves, had been positively sharing their life. The couple also shares news and suggestions regarding LGBT families worldwide. Many lesbians endorsed them as the model lesbian/rainbow family. Starting from 2015, the *lala* couple has been collecting stories of "non-*xinghun tongzhi* families with children", which they later termed 'rainbow families'. As the public account attracted thousands of followers, the *lala* couple organised online support groups for non-heterosexual people who want to have or have children to exchange experiences and resources. Although they strictly prohibited group members from advertising ART agencies, there were still employees from ART agencies trying to join these groups. The *lala* couple emphasised that firm self-identification was significant for queer parents to raise children, as they pointed out that some older queer parents didn't accept their sexualities well and could easily collapse when their kids questioned their sexualities. Moreover, the *lala* couple described their choice to have a rainbow family as a resistant and aggressive move. In other words, they believed that they chose to set their lifestyle in opposition to obedience and compromise. In this way, they appeared to embrace western coming-out advocacy and acknowledged the rainbow family as a lifestyle that attacked the normative heterosexual family.

In addition to online social media platforms, the 'rainbow family' and 'rainbow baby' have been increasingly acknowledged in offline queer communities. PFLAG China, one of the largest Chinese non-profit LGBT organisations whose major aim was to promote

family harmony, have demonstrably contributed to the standardised discourse on the Chinese rainbow family or role model LGBT family. From 2017 to 2019, I have attended six PFLAG events in four cities. Four of them are LGBT talkfests and two of them are LBT special sharing sessions. In each LGBT talkfest, there were several types of themes and guest speakers that were never absent. Firstly, the events usually began with the topic of self-acceptance. The guest speakers were gay men and lesbians who had completely come out to their families and the public and devoted themselves to the LGBT community. 'Coming out and family acceptance' was one of the most emotional themes when the parents of gay men and lesbians shared their feelings and experiences after knowing their children were not straight. They were addressed as '*Mama/Papa*' and were surrounded by young non-heterosexual people who wanted advice on coming out to their parents. At least one same-sex couple would share their love stories and advice on maintaining a 'lasting relationship'. The hosts always started the discussion by asking the couple, "how long have you been together?" When the couple answered with a period that was usually several to more than ten years, attendees all clapped and cheered. Queer parents were also the necessary guest speakers in the 'having children' section. As a gay father with two sons, Tian has been invited to be a guest speaker at various online and offline PFLAG events since he had his second son (who was acknowledged as a rainbow baby) and came out to his parents. When the hosts began to introduce the same-sex couples and queer parents, the screen would display a photo of a sweet moment between them. The themes were selected by organisers to encourage participants to come out to their parents, avoid entering any form of heterosexual marriage, have a lasting same-sex intimate relationship, build a network of elder support, and take part in LGBT activities.

Organisers nominated the guest speakers as role models who gave guidance to curious attendees. Besides Tian, other invited guest speakers were mostly considered successful individuals by the public, including doctors, professors, entrepreneurs, etc. After these same-sex couples and queer parents walked off the stage, there were always some attendees approaching them and asking for their WeChat IDs or phone numbers. It should be noted that the majority of attendees in these LGBT talkfests events were self-identified gay men, some were self-identified lesbians, and only a few identified as transgender or bisexual or other gender and sexual categories.

Certainly, guest speakers' personal characteristics and resources were often admired by numerous attendees and seen as the reason they were so successful in both their careers and familial life. On the other hand, the selected guest speakers and themes have discouraged attendees from expressing themselves from disadvantaged backgrounds even though PFLAG China didn't charge any entrance fee for its talkfests. During the same PFLAG talkfest at which Tian was one of the guest speakers, a gay man raised his hand and asked:

"I don't understand why I can't find a boyfriend. I already came out to my family ten years ago. I think having a romantic relationship (*tanlian'ai*) is harder than coming out. Otherwise, I wouldn't be alone. I have attended several of your events but no one wants to talk to me further. I feel everyone is young and good-looking except me. I am now asking if anyone is interested in me?"

The man's strong accent and clothes indicated his rural working social class status, and he was obviously middle-aged. He was surrounded by young gay men wearing fashionable clothes and wristbands with rainbow elements. After his speech, the silence in the banquet hall lasted for at least ten seconds. The host comforted the man briefly, and the event moved on as usual. Various studies on Chinese LGBT/ *tongzhi* activist groups and LGBT communities have pointed out how sexual politics are shaped by the state, capitalism, and the discourse on cultural citizenship (Rofel 2007, Kong 2010, Bao 2018, Wei 2020). The story of Mei and Youzi below further delineates how the Chinese homonormative discourse on the role model queer family has been fortified.

At another PFLAG talkfest, a young gay man yelled excitedly: "they have been together for 10 years! I think they should be the next guest speakers!" Suddenly being the centre of attention, Mei and Youzi looked shy as a hundred queer attendees turned their heads to look at them. Mei and Youzi were both 30 years old. They met each other via an online forum when Youzi was at university. Surprisingly, they found out that they used to live in the same neighbourhood. They smiled and told me they fell in love at first sight. Mei had a hard time living with her family of origin. Her mother died when she was young. Her father then married a young woman who Mei describes as impetuous. Mei couldn't get along with her stepmother. Consequently, she quit school and moved out of the home. When Mei met Youzi, she was already working as a clerk. After their relationship became serious, Youzi asked Mei to move to her home and live with her parents. Mei's parents are not aware of their intimate relationship as Youzi introduced Mei as a close friend who

had been suffering with some family drama. Mei lived in Youzi's home for two years until Youzi graduated from university. They currently live in an apartment away from Youzi's parents in the suburb of Shenzhen and far from Mei's parents as well. Youzi was working as an engineer in a state-owned company, which provided a stable level of income.

During my fieldwork, Youzi and Mei both entered *xinghun* marriages as they felt this was the pragmatic and reasonable response to marriage pressure. On a Sunday night in March 2019, we were having dinner and Youzi mentioned she was going to get the marriage certificate the next day due to a small accident:

“It was funny. We (Youzi and her *xinghun* husband) went to the civil affairs bureau this Friday trying to get a marriage certificate, and then we discovered we didn't have the required photo! You know, the official photo that will be on the marriage certificate. So tomorrow we are going to the photo booth at first and then go to the civil affairs bureau.”

Mei nodded and added some amusing details to Youzi's story. Mei and Youzi described the process around arranging *xinghun* marriage as a series of daily trifles. I met many same-sex couples who became worried and scared when they started to talk about their *xinghun* marriage experiences. Therefore, I was impressed by Youzi and Mei's relaxed attitude. They went through the process together and every future move was planned. They both notarised pre-marital property with their *xinghun* partners and were not worried about any potential financial disputes. Furthermore, Youzi and Mei were certain that they didn't want children, either on their own or with their *xinghun* partners. They avoided parent-in-law issues as much as they could, and agreed with their *xinghun* husbands that they wouldn't own any communal property or have a child. In many online chatting groups, such *xinghun* marriages are often called successful and nominal ones – a minimal bond between the gay 'husband' and lesbian 'wife'.

Youzi and Mei only went to the PFLAG talkfest once with their gay friend and didn't understand why people in the event treated them like celebrities. “We are just a normal couple, no secrets of success”, Mei said when others asked them to share their love story. After I met them at that event, Youzi and Mei only hung out with me and my partner, and they never attend PFLAG events anymore. They didn't enjoy participating in PFLAG talkfests, as they felt they would be judged by others. Although they didn't feel their

xinghun marriage was a problematic and unmoral move, they shortly realised that the practice of any form of heterosexual marriage was conceived as a symbol of one's weakness and obedience in PFLAG philosophy. To put it another way, Mei and Youzi didn't want to be and indeed didn't qualify as role model speakers at PFLAG events. Coming out to their parents and the wider public and having a rainbow baby were not included as a part of their future plan.

The capacity to establish an acknowledged modern rainbow family is conditioned by one's gender and socio-economical class rather than one's 'deviant' sexual desires and behaviours. Firstly, female same-sex couples who raised children together were noticeably fewer and less visible than gay co-fathers. Until now, Chinese women have generally earned less income and had less personal autonomy than men (Tan & Jiang 2006, Fincher 2014, Ji et al. 2017), and these issues on gender inequality make childrearing a more challenging task for lesbian co-mothers. In addition, respondents working in governmental sectors and state-owned enterprises were especially concerned with their image as single parents in their colleagues and employers' eyes, not to mention their non-normative sexualities. Having a 'rainbow family' also means having children out-of-wedlock, which is considered to be disobeying family planning policy and hence could cause the unmarried parent to be fined and harm one's career. Chinese people and organisations who applied the term 'rainbow family' to themselves were often required to prove their relationships within a Euro-American-originated frame of anti-heteronormativity, which set them apart from 'traditional' lifestyles and state policies.

The emerging discourse on the 'rainbow family', like that on 'free love' in transforming Chinese societies, suggests a formulation of seemingly rigid contradictions between tradition and modernity. As rainbow families become a symbol of modernity and progression in online and offline queer communities, non-heterosexual people with 'normative' marriages currently or in the past remain silenced in queer public spaces, as they are under the gaze of other non-heterosexual people, who seem to regard themselves as more modern. The LGBT identified micro-celebrities, the LGBT organisations like PFLAG China and their partnering ART companies were ultimately endorsing the same kind of queer role models and again stressing queer individuals' personal agency to gain upward mobility, which echoes the dominant narrative of being a good sexual citizen by

being a good consumer (Rofel 2007) and the discourses of modernity and homonormativity (Duggan 2002).

If the emerging discourse on ‘rainbow family’ in Chinese same-sex communities embodies homonormative subjectivities and norms, this kind of homonormative politics should not be perceived as the same as Euro-American-originated homonormativity. Even before I started my fieldwork, I realised many LGBT, women, and other minority organisations never referred to themselves as ‘non-governmental organisations (*feizhengfu zuzhi*)’, but instead called themselves ‘non-profit organisations (*feiyingli zuzhi*)’. People working at PFLAG China and other surviving organisations gave others some simple advice: don’t discuss sensitive (*mingan*) topics like civil rights, politics, and activism, and don’t work with any foreign organisations, including embassies. Most of PFLAG’s events tended to focus on queer intimate and familial life, such as providing support on coming out to parents and building LGBT friend networks for old age support. In this way, PFLAG China itself reflected an interesting paradox in the tradition-modernity binaries. And yet, being a *wenhe* (peaceable, non-aggressive) LGBT organisation emphasising “promoting family harmony” and often quoting President Xi’s words in its visual materials, PFLAG’s funding has been constantly questioned and interfered with by local officials, according to a full-time employee. On the other hand, many non-heterosexual people didn’t attend PFLAG’s events as they told me, “these organisations are too radical. I am just an ordinary (*putong*) person”. In other words, PFLAG China might not be an LGBT rights charity in the Euro-American definition, but it was still considered too aggressive and too high-profile among a large number of Chinese non-heterosexual people. Some of them only showed up at LGBT events for pragmatic reasons such as finding dates and looking for relevant support. A PFLAG volunteer complained to me, “many people only think of us when their parents found out they are gay, that saying, when the fire is burning their eyebrows”.

The exclusion and inclusion processes of ‘rainbow family’ in Chinese queer communities reveal the multi-layered interplay of social status, gender norms and sexualness. ‘Sexuality’, as Khanna (2017) points out, emerges as an aspect of personhood, a ‘modern’ phenomenon, a political object, and a context of queer movement. Yet, sexual desire doesn’t always inform interiority or the inner psychic formation about someone (Khanna 2017). The personal accounts above demonstrate the limits of the dominant sexuality-as-

personhood framework in understanding queer citizenship and social mobility in a non-Euro-American context. The discursive relation between sexual desires and relational personhood in China cannot be ascribed to 'sexuality types'. Rather, a shift toward understanding the sexualness of the Chinese citizen is vital.

Moreover, the discussions on Chinese rainbow families tended to focus on one's personal agency in creating a role model queer family or one's failure to do so; yet it didn't mean that social and political factors had less influence on queer intimate and familial lives. In today's China, politics is indeed a sensitive topic, and people only felt comfortable talking about it with their most familiar ones. What was often bypassed in the daily conversations in queer everyday lives were social and political factors such as LGBT rights, public and governmental attitudes toward same-sex marriage and queer co-parenting. For most Chinese people, social and political factors would not change for them, but they could change themselves to secure better living arrangements. I concur with Boyce (2014) that non-heterosexual people's ambivalent responses to sexual rights reveal the "complex relationships between sexual subjectivity, economy, law, the state, and people's most intimate aspirations" (2014:1201). Concisely, Chinese non-heterosexual people's endorsement of the rainbow family concentrated more on the individual's capabilities rather than the person's non-normative gender and sexual relationships. I now move to explore their attitude toward public visibility and acceptance of queer families.

Being 'Ordinary' (invisible), being 'Radical' (visible) in different times and spaces

In Chinese popular online forums, it was common to see homophobic statements under the topic of LGBT matter as below:

"I am straight. I am not against *tongxinglian* (homosexuality). I just can't accept their sexuality. I think I am being nice enough and you *tongxinglian* people shouldn't ask more from me."

"I am fine with gay people in society, but you shouldn't ask us to help you advocate for homosexuality."

"I don't discriminate against homosexual people, but you can't flaunt your homosexuality on the street!"

Such statements often reduced homosexuality to same-sex sexual behaviour. In this sense, non-heterosexual conjugal relationships, especially female same-sex relationships, were ignored rather than discriminated against (see also Kam 2013, Sang 2003). At the same

time, the emerging online debates against same-sex marriage were linked to the issues of *tongqi* (wives of gay men) and commercial surrogacy while neglecting the very existence of non-heterosexual families, especially female conjugal relations.

In the interviews, nonetheless, most respondents tried to convince me that the social atmosphere in Shenzhen was tolerant and they never experienced homophobic behaviours in their daily life as non-heterosexual identified subjects. Many reasoned that homophobic behaviours happened mostly in underdeveloped rural areas and in online forums full of ‘hatred comments’, and linked homophobic attitudes with one’s low-quality (*di suzhi*) status. This is a major reason queer individuals, especially queer parents, desired housing in middle-upper class neighbourhoods.

An, a gay father and an entrepreneur enjoying a middle-upper class life in Shenzhen, said he was not concerned about homophobic messages. During our interview at An’s company, An took a break to look after his crying children. The cameraman responsible for videotaping our interview commented:

“I bet he is not troubled by having three kids, or you know, parenting without getting married. If I had as much money as him, I would be happy all the time and have as many children as I could.”

An emphasised many times that “the society is more tolerant than you think”. He provided several examples:

“I and Ye (An’s partner) hold hands on the street and no one says anything. One time, I forwarded an article about gay men to my WeChat Moments and forget to make it public only to selected friends – it became public to all Wechat contacts. Then my business partners ‘liked’ it.”

During the interview, An contended that public recognition for homosexuality was a false proposition and he didn’t need such recognition. For An, such progression wouldn’t do much to aid his career. In the meantime, An was aware that other people rarely asked about his intimate life and family status due to his high social position. An was also aware that the news about his mixed-race sons and the images of his high-profile rainbow family helped him to gain attention and potential business resources. As an employer, An didn’t worry that the cameraman would ever say anything to embarrass him and his sons.

In a similar narrative, Tommy concluded that “we are very lucky”, as he and Joe never had any noteworthy trouble being gay fathers in their everyday lives. One reason for that, as Tommy explained, was that “the big city is more tolerant.” Tommy’s apartment is in the centre of Guangzhou. Tommy said he was worried that Jack would have problems with having two daddies. Thus, when Jack was in kindergarten, Tommy told Jack, “You have seen many types of families in our neighbourhood. Some of your friends have only one father; some have only one mother. You shouldn’t discriminate against any of them.” Tommy meant not only divorced parents, but also the mistresses who had illegitimate children with married businessmen in Hong Kong. Tommy shared the neighbourhood with some wealthy mistresses, and they were respectful enough not to judge each other in public. When the three of them walk in the friendly and elegant neighbourhood, no one has ever questioned who Jack’s father was. Tommy once visited Jack’s elementary school teacher before Mother’s Day, when students were often required to write an essay about their mothers or show gratitude to their mothers. Tommy said,

“I told Jack’s teacher that Jack’s father and mother were divorced a long time ago, and he doesn’t live with his mother. Therefore, I hoped she could relax the requirement a little bit. Maybe she could ask students to write about any family member they like. She took my advice.”

These vivid examples of social tolerance listed by An and Tommy have many things in common. They hardly ever mentioned their queer sexualities as a primary focus. Rather, they described how others reacted to their relationship with their same-sex partners or children. Quite a few gay fathers and lesbian mothers expressed optimistic beliefs that society was becoming tolerant to non-heterosexual families when they never displayed their gay/lesbian parenthood in public sites. In other words, they blurred the boundaries between social tolerance toward non-normative families and social tolerance toward non-normative sexualities. Non-normative family is anything outside the imaginary of a hetero-reproductive nuclear family made up of an opposite-sex married couple and children. In such narratives, queer parents’ images in social institutions like kindergarten and hospital were often conflated with those of single parents or divorced families. Queer parents in this research usually told the schoolteachers that “my child has no father/mother”. In urban cities like Shenzhen, the teachers could usually get the hint from the subtle explanation. Queer parents, therefore, concluded their neighbours and schoolteachers “respected people’s privacy because they don’t ask private questions”. For

Tommy and many other non-heterosexual subjects in urban China, the fact that they were not pushed to explicitly disclose their queer sexualities to their neighbours, work partners, children's teachers, and governmental officials to live their queer familial life was the evidence of social progression. In this way, social tolerance was understood as equating to not disturbing one's everyday life rather than supporting one's rights. The subtle expression of one's queer relationships and the silent tolerance of them prevailed in the discourse on social tolerance, distinct from the Euro-American activist advocating of being 'out and proud' and public visibility.

Among my friend-respondents who contended they were just ordinary people, social news and legal policy were often considered as 'public matters' that wouldn't directly pose threats to one's personal life. In other words, most non-heterosexual people didn't immediately think about being socially and legally recognised as a couple or family when the topic of coming out was brought up. They understood their private life and the political public as two unrelated things. Many explained to me that they wanted to "focus on practical things rather than political things". Some respondents commented that "LGBT activists couldn't even feed themselves". As a result, LGBT organisations like PFLAG China tended to present the goal of their events as "making friends and giving suggestions on dealing with parents" (practical) rather than "promoting LGBT rights" (political) in order to attract attendees.

Here I relate the discourse on coming out and public visibility to the private-public sphere in queer intimate and familial life rather than identity politics. The coming-out advocacy in the Euro-American world could be troubling for queer couples in a non-Western society (Wei 2007, Engebretsen & Schroeder 2015). The Western notion of coming out and being 'closeted' implies a duality as one is either completely out or keeps their sexuality completely hidden. Valentine points out that "the process of coming out is more complex with individuals maintaining multiple identities in different space and in one space but at different times" (1993: 246). Hence, time and space are significant factors for non-heterosexual people to decide either to reveal their queerness or 'pass' as straight.

Both in their late 20s, Saisai and her girlfriend Yina had an informal wedding party with their parents and friends in 2018 to celebrate their ten-year relationship. Saisai was working at a state-owned enterprise, and Yina was working for hotel chains. Yina was

Saisai's junior at University, and she realised she liked women when she fell for Saisai. Yina thought of herself as bisexual and actively made many LGBT friends through queer social media and volunteer networks. Furthermore, they both came out to their parents in recent years. Saisai explained:

“Coming out was slow and difficult progress. My mother and Yina's mother have accepted our relationships, but both of our fathers are still unhappy about us. My father believed that I would have a poor life living with a woman, so we worked hard to prove that he was wrong.”

During their wedding, their parents and relatives shed tears of joy when they all stood together for wedding photos. Saisai and Yina thus saw the wedding as a great strategy to make their family recognise their relationship. Saisai and Yina's experiences don't fit into the coming out/coming home binary, as they valued both their individualistic desires and their parents' feelings. In the local lesbian community, Saisai and Yina were considered a successfully 'out' lesbian couple blessed by family elders. The narratives of coming out and being accepted by each other's parents were repeated on every occasion when an experienced queer couple showed up. No one would bother to ask if they had come out in their workplace. As a short-hair T-style woman, Saisai thought her boss must already know she was lesbian but didn't bother to question her:

“The employer, especially in private firms, doesn't care about your sex life at all. They just care about whether you (female employees) are married and the possibility of taking pregnancy leave. Believe me, they would be happier if you never get married and never had pregnancy leave!”

Another explanation for the indifferent attitude was perhaps that non-heterosexual people in Chinese cities felt they could easily pretend about/ 'weaken' their queerness once they need to negotiate with the wider social world or the Chinese legal system. I once had dinner with a lesbian couple Danny and Pam (previously mentioned in chapter 4&6) in a fusion restaurant which they recommended. In the last few years, Danny changed her visible T style to a more feminine one, growing long hair and wearing feminine formal clothes. She explained that it was partly because of her job as a lawyer and partly because of her changing understanding of T/P roles. Pam had worked in different cities as a freelance photographer before she thought about coming out to her parents. Danny and Pam had been living together for two years and were saving money to have children together through the process of *A luan B huai*. While Pam had come out to her parents,

Danny promised her parents she would get married and was looking for a nominal *xinghun* husband. In Danny's workplace, Pam showed up as Danny's flatmate every time she picked Danny up after work. As we walked out of the restaurant, the restaurant owner, who was also a friend of Danny's employer, recognised Danny's face and went to greet us. After some friendly small talk, the owner said to Danny, "Take your *guimi* (bosom female friend) to my restaurant next time!" Danny smiled and said yes. We said goodbye to the restaurant owner and left. This night was an ordinary scene in both Danny's and my everyday knowledge. Many of my lesbian peers told me their bosses say homophobic statements all the time but could never tell their employees are not straight. I shared the same cultural knowledge with Danny and many other respondents, so I rarely bothered to ask them why they chose to hide their queerness in the workplace or other public spaces. Initially, I didn't write it down in my field notes because the taken-for-grantedness of spatial taxonomies like public and private happened instinctually in our lives. Queer relationships were presented in different degrees of visibility, as Danny and Pam were a loving couple in my eyes, close friends in Danny's family relatives' eyes, and flatmates in Danny's colleagues' eyes. For Danny and Pam, it was no more difficult than lifting a finger to pass as straight in public as they rarely need to explain their relationships to others. Whether their colleagues were homophobic or not, their personal interests wouldn't be affected.

Often, my friend-respondents describe such practices as keeping a low-profile life to avoid unnecessary troubles:

"Chinese people are very realistic. They have too many things to worry about: money, career, house, etc. They just want to earn as much money as they can to feel secure. As long as everyone is living their own life and minding their own business, why would they even pay attention to us?" (Wen, age 34)

Under the narrative of pragmatism, a supportive social environment for non-heterosexual people often didn't stand out as a primary focus. Rather, it was one's financial capability that was mentioned most often. A gay respondent, Min, explicitly summarised his understanding of the '*jia* (family)':

"I think there are two important factors that make me feel at home: children (*haizi*) and a house (*fangzi*)".

Similarly, some younger respondents said owning a pet and a flat would be enough for them to feel like they were at home. In this sense, the desire for a privatised *jia*/family

space is connected with the desire for a middle-class lifestyle (Zhang 2008). One's family fell into the category of one's own business, distinct from the general public or political public. I have met non-heterosexual people working in private firms, state-owned enterprises, and universities. Most respondents told me the reason they didn't come out in the workplace was that such an act was 'unnecessary' and 'pointless' rather than risky. In everyday life, there was a strong sense of distinction between public and private space.

From my ethnographic fieldwork, however, it became evident that social policies on marriage, *hukou* citizenship, and parenting custody have drastically shaped queer's people's practices for building lasting conjugal relationships and having children with same-sex partners. To some extent, legal policies have shaped people's imagination and choices with regard to creating a new '*jia* / family' with their queer partners.

Several months after their informal wedding, Saisai and Yina complained to other lesbian friends and me that they still felt like they were dating (*tanlian'ai*) rather than married, especially when Yina went to work at a new company and wrote her married status as 'unmarried' in the employee personal details form. Yina's new colleagues tried to introduce Yina to potential male mates several times, and Yina had to make different excuses to refuse their invitations. Intimacy, as Berlant points out, "reveals itself to be a relation associated with tacit fantasies, tacit rules, and tacit obligations to remain unproblematic" (1998:287).

Saisai and Yina's experience with their family members and colleagues disclosed the fictive fantasy of keeping queer intimate relationship in a clear work-family binary. Not long after, Saisai and Yina went to the local notary public office to register as appointed guardians for each other. This gave them some feelings of legal bond and security. Adult voluntary guardianship, permitted by article 33 in the General Provisions of the Civil Law 2017 version, allows adults with the full capacity for civil conduct to name a trusted person to make decisions for them in case they lost or partially lost the capacity for civil conduct. Initially, this article was not formulated to protect same-sex relationships by any means, although it was quickly circulated in urban same-sex communities as a practical tactic to tighten conjugal relationships. Even so, not being recognised as a married couple and a social unit by others shaped Saisai and Yina's personal feelings about their relationship.

Conclusion: Transforming Families and Queer Modernity

To sum up, this chapter treats family/*jia* as a transforming discourse. Fiona and Alice's experiences with their parents and relatives during the Chinese New Year Holidays have revealed the changing understanding of the scope of family. Customarily, Chinese people have a reunion dinner on New Year's Eve with all members from the same patrilineal family line or the same surname. People travelled back to their hometowns and visited relatives during the Chinese spring festival. For an increasing number of Chinese young people, the notion of big family (*da jia*), which refers to the Confucianist patrilineal family, has been replaced by the modern small family (*xiao jia*), which refers to the nuclear family with one's parents included. The emerging small family has been fuelled by economic reforms and social policies. Young non-heterosexual people's life choices and family aspirations have been shaping and are shaped by the changing notion of a Chinese family, and this is particularly visible in their home-leaving and home-reunion experiences. Wei (2020) develops a paradigm of stretched kinship among Chinese non-heterosexual people, who try not to break up with their family but keep their relationship with their families of origin elastic and resilient in their home leaving and reunion process. This chapter's personal accounts further point to the stretched and elastic meaning of natal families in Chinese society. Young people didn't visit their relatives as often as the older generations, and they didn't feel the moral obligation to do so. Rather, many of them hoped their parents would put more focus on them instead of the big family. In this sense, family/*jia* represents not only blood relativeness, but also emotional closeness. While parent-child relations are still central in the Chinese kinship system, the importance of 'big family' and relatives have been weakened. In other words, even blood families or families of origin could have different meanings for Chinese people from different generations. As many respondents clarified, they only needed their parents' acceptance, not their relatives'. The changing conception of family in transforming Chinese society cannot be neglected, as the elasticity in Chinese kinship values provides negotiating space for Chinese non-heterosexual people to express their desires.

Non-heterosexual people who migrated to first-tier cities like Shenzhen took the opportunity to distance themselves from relatives and made light of their moral judgments. At the same time, they were still in materially and mentally interdependent

relationships with their parents. The visible trend of “reverse spring festival reunion” in first-tier cities indicated that both the parent and the queer child were essential actors in Chinese family transformations. Still, non-heterosexual people who stayed in their hometowns might feel morally obliged to maintain good relations with relatives and hence find it difficult to distance themselves from the big family.

Various forms of non-heterosexual families have emerged in today’s urban China, and they are characterised by many voices. Non-heterosexual individuals from different age groups and social backgrounds, LGBT non-profit organisations, same-sex dating APPs, and ART agencies have all contributed to the discursive and dynamic understandings of role model ‘*tongzhi*/rainbow family’. Tian’s account indicates manifold and complex orders of family-forming processes among Chinese non-heterosexual people, as people may choose to enter a heterosexual *xinghun* marriage and have children before they come out to parents and find a same-sex partner to form a queer family with.

The role model rainbow family promoted by LGBT non-profit organisations and gay and lesbian influencers linked the use of ART with the definition of ‘rainbow baby’ and more crucially, the image of a perfect same-sex nuclear family. On the other hand, this dominant and homonormative discourse on the rainbow family has often omitted queer subjects who lacked the capabilities to settle in big cities, to consume ART services and to raise children on their own. Wilson (2006) recognises the conflation of ‘Western’, ‘modern’ and ‘globalisation’ as the source of sexual modernity in Asian societies. Under such Western hegemony, queer life and practices that don’t correspond to the first-world model are described as ‘traditional’. In this context, the inclusion process for non-heterosexual subjects is selective, and peri-urban/rural queer life-worlds may be represented as hard to reconcile with utopian queer imaginaries (Boyce & Dasgupta, 2017). As a lesbian couple who have been living together for ten years, Youzi and Mei’s choice to enter *xinghun* with gay men rather than coming out to parents was interpreted as a symbol of weakness in homonormative spaces. As rainbow families become a symbol of modernity and progression in online and offline queer communities, non-heterosexual people who didn’t embrace an ‘out and proud’ lifestyle remained silenced in queer public spaces. At the same time, PFLAG China and other LGBT organisations’ efforts to avoid political topics like civil rights, politics, and activism in their events for surviving as a queer person in China reflected the

ambivalence of the modern-tradition binary in queer communities. The role model rainbow families, therefore, represented a desiring non-heteronormative lifestyle punctuated by its bourgeois politics.

In researching Thai migrant women in the global labour market, Mills (1999) suggests modernity is contextual/contexted, multiple; it represents “a break between past and present” (13). As Mills points out, when migrant women moved between urban and rural areas, they deal with not just a shift in spaces, but also in identity. There is no one singular, stable description of Chinese modernity; rather, Chinese modernity is a dynamic discourse and it needs to be understood in its context. Similarly, the acknowledgement of ‘rainbow’ politics among Chinese non-heterosexual people embodies their understanding of both Chinese modernity and queer modernity. In other words, the descriptive sense of desiring a queer nuclear family is geo-temporal and is shaped by state policy, capitalism, gender and family norms, and the western-originated language of coming-out advocacy.

The middle-class non-heterosexual person’s claim that society is becoming more modern and more tolerant toward homosexuality is contextualised and preconditioned, as we mustn’t see the socio-economic status as isolated from non-heterosexual relationships. The subtle expression of one’s queer relationships and the silent tolerance of them prevailed in the discourse on social tolerance, which was distinct from the western activist advocacy of being ‘out and proud’ and public visibility. Social tolerance was understood to equate to not disturbing one’s privacy rather than supporting one’s rights. In this way, public visibility and sexual rights were rarely mentioned in queer daily lives as essential needs, while financial capabilities were desired as essential for establishing a modern queer nuclear family. Consequently, most Chinese non-heterosexual people tended to internalise the failure to establish a recognisable family.

Yet, this research demonstrates how social policies on marriage, citizenship, and parenting custody drastically shaped non-heterosexual people’s perceived freedom and choices to create a new ‘*jia* / family’ and how in many ways these choices relate to socio-economic status. It also raises the query of how certain narratives of acceptance

and tolerance close down around the ‘modern’ ‘homonormative’ ideologies and these in turn produce negative stereotyping and class stratification inside queer social circles.

Returning to queer couples who claimed they created lasting relationships and families through financial cooperation, mutual property, and co-parenting practices, their choices were already conditioned by the existing social and legal context. Negotiating with the social and legal uncertainties in the process of creating and maintaining queer families through obtaining social mobilities and economic capital has ultimately become the (homo)normative narrative in queer communities. We must recognise that to be transgressive or to be assimilative within society is not an available choice and is “not easily practiced and achieved; rather they are complexly inhabited and refused, structured and reproduced” (Taylor 2010:75). From the most ‘visible’ gay co-fathers like An and Ye to the most ‘low-profile’ lesbian couples like Mei and Youzi, whether they were recognised as a good and representative non-heteronormative family involved constantly re-appropriating the public matter-private life dualities. The paralleled rhetoric of role model queer family and ordinary Chinese citizen take us back to the discussion of sexuality and sexualness, as they powerfully stress the manifold and dynamic process of constructing one’s sense of ‘self’. One may tactically choose to be recognised as an ordinary hetero-reproductive family by wider society (namely, work partners and public sectors) and identify as queer family in queer social spaces synchronously. In other words, they may not always be radically queer, and they may not always be assimilative. The modern queer families in urban China are therefore fluid in different times and spaces.

In short, the queer family can include family modes that are radically different from and conform to the mainstream hetero-reproductive family model. Moreover, the emerging kinship practices, such as gay and lesbian *xinghun* marriage and surrogacy, lead to conflicting moral interpretations in queer social circles and wider society. It becomes problematic to make a unified characterisation of the Chinese modalities of queer family. The diverse Chinese modalities of the queer family challenge the universalist, linear assumption of queer modernity that only exists in the form of being out and progressive.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

In 2018, 2019, and 2020, I spent a lot of time with the lesbian couple Xie and Hong and their baby son Doudou. Xie is from the post-70s generation (70 *hou*) and Hong is from the post-80s (80 *hou*). They started their own business and successfully settled in Shenzhen. Through the technique of artificial insemination, Hong gave birth to Doudou in 2018 using her egg and Xie's brother's sperm. During our dinners, Hong and Xie always took turns to hold their sons and walk around in the restaurants. Like other middle-age friend-informants in this research, Hong and Xie found it strange and even uncomfortable to articulate their kinship practices and life choices in terms of non-normative sexual identities. When I first introduced my research subject to them, Hong looked bewildered and asked, "Why bother researching this? we are all the same."

Hong's words evidently resonated with most non-heterosexual individuals in China, who don't think of their sexual practice as a determining factor in constructing their personhood. Rather, Hong saw herself as a responsible and hard-working middle-class Chinese citizen. In this sense, we could miss the point if we assumed a universalised centrality of individual selfhood and ascribe Hong's sense of self to sexual identity. Hong didn't feel she was different from most Chinese people and, more crucially, she desired the same socio-economic capital and a middle-class lifestyle as many other Chinese citizen-subjects. This vignette again reminds us to understand the diversity of gender and sexual experiences in Chinese context with a sense of individual and relational selfhood (Yan 2017, Khanna 2017). Echoing Patel's call to "bring sexuality into the ecology of sustainability and rethink fullness and care, life and futurity" (2006:54), this research has found Chinese non-heterosexual subjects' strategies in forming and sustaining mutuality/*jiban* for long-lasting queer relationships are marked by their complex understanding of love, care, family, risk, and moral sense of self. 'Non-heterosexual people' can simultaneously refer to a child, a lover, a parent, a husband/wife, and so on, in different given social relations. Each kinship role involves discursive moral expectations that intersect with Confucian familism, state policy, capitalism, and homonormative politics. This research is theoretically grounded in kinship and queer scholarship that denaturalises the notion of biology and centrality of hetero-reproductive relationships (e.g., Strathern 1992a, Hayden 1995, Folger 2008)

with the purpose of furthering our understanding of kinship, queer life aspirations, and Chinese social change.

This thesis identifies several key topics with respect to queering kinship in urban China: queer intimate love, queer parenting, queer family, and queer futurity. The first ethnographic part focuses on queer intimate relationships. The proliferation of role terms from binary T-P/1-0 to diverse spectrums and shifting modes of same-sex relationships across different generations have innovatively destabilised gendered culture and, at the same time, produced hierarchy of same-sex relationships models. At the same time, it is vital not to reduce T-P/1-0 relationships to heterosexual-informed modes as it would risk understating heterosexual relationships as an eternally static object for comparison. The dating practices in queer communities have been constantly shaped by discursive discourses on modernity, lesbian/gay authenticity, and gender cultures.

Contrasting to cruising public parks and consumerist bars, non-heterosexual people in urban China realise offline and online cultural spaces including queer film clubs and same-sex socialising apps as emerging spaces for seeking long-term loving relationships. In the meantime, the vague path from unrelated intimate stranger to real-life partner in queer dating practices renders Chinese moral standards uncertain as they are relationally defined in accordance with one's positionality in a given social relation (Yan 2017). When non-heterosexual people developed an intimate relationship with someone who was considered an unrelated individual completely outside their established social webs, their sentiments, health, and assets were all potential risks which they must internalise by themselves (Kleinman et al. 2011). One critical guidance emerging from online dating with a same-sex lover is to make sure the potential date is honest and reliable, meaning the person doesn't intend to take advantage of or hide their marital status. Such uncertainty in seeking same-sex relationships needs to be understood within both the globalising queer politics and the context of the rapid modernisation and ethical shift in urban China. Generationally, trusting concerns have increasingly shifted from exposing oneself to public judgement to being taken advantage of emotionally and financially (see also Fu 2015). In this sense, what young non-heterosexual people desired from romantic relationships in many ways looked like conjugal love, characterised by reliability and companionship.

The practices of seeking and maintaining stable same-sex relationships for non-heterosexual people encompasses the blurred distinction of romantic/free love and conjugal/companionate love. Non-heterosexual people's intimate experience cannot be articulated alone without acknowledging their family backgrounds, career paths, and migrating experiences to the 'big city'. Research respondents stressed similar cultural tastes and complementary personal characteristics as the main factor they fell in love with their same-sex partners. In other words, non-heterosexual people in today's urban China increasingly perceive their relationship partners beyond erotic lovers. They constantly negotiate economic, cultural, and legal factors that threaten their life status and queer intimate relationship, and keep a manageable distance from their families of origin in their hometowns. Most importantly, they attempt to find pragmatic solutions to secure their cohabiting relationship when the legalisation of same-sex marriage sounds too far a step for them. Without the housing bought by themselves or their parents which ensured their stable life status, queer couples would have to find alternative ways to maintain their relationships. Both the notions of conjugal and parental love are infused with consumer culture since purchasing goods for the other is closely linked to the expression of care and love in everyday life.

The strategies for Chinese queer people to maintain long-lasting same-sex partners often involve creating an exclusive cohabiting relationship that is perceived as irreversible and sustainable, most often through owning mutual property or/and co-parenting practices. Such intentions and practices on the kinship continuum firstly render the material underpinning to family and care relationships (Simpson 1994, Patel 2006). For queer couples, establishing *jiban* (mutual burden) with each other in a foreseen future creates the feeling of mutual responsibility and security, in other words, an insured life against risk. At first glance, creating *jiban* is often understood and practiced as a substitute for a legal marriage. Yet, the individual narratives in this ethnographic research showed that *jiban* is not risk-free when it is not protected by state law or approved by each other's families of origin. The gay-lesbian co-parenting practices in *xinghun* marriage further complicate the matter when children often become irreversible *jiban* for the gay and lesbian co-partners instead of same-sex lovers. In this sense, *jiban* is only as effective as legal marriage when queer individuals have acquired adequate upward mobility and the financial capability to be a good consumer/ sexual citizen, and

more critically, to be reproductive and fulfil their family duty and thus obtain parental acceptance. To put it another way, queer individuals envision a socially acknowledged successful life as the precondition of having a role model queer family, while the failure to foster durable *jiban* with one's chosen ties is linked with the lack of individual capability rather than structural factors (see also Wang 2019). When a queer relationship powered by *jiban* comes to an end, the separation process for queer couples can also be complicated, just like going through a divorce. I suggest that non-heterosexual people's strategies to create *jiban* are normalised as the pragmatic and desirable choice under existing Chinese social policies and consumer culture.

This ethnography's second theme is queer parenting, including the various pathways to become queer parents (or not) and the moral discourses that emerged from these practices. Non-heterosexual people's desires to be parents can be both linked to the normative Confucian familism and viewed as radically queer. While some non-heterosexual people claim that they have no choice but to have children to please their parents or to expect elderly support in return from their children, many non-heterosexual people disconnect their purpose for entering heterosexual marriages and having children from the notions of traditional familial duty. Instead, they frame their motivation for being parents as an individual and voluntary choice. Also, a generational shift in understanding the parent-child relation and filial piety from 'obedience' and 'duty' to 'mutual respect' and 'equal relations' is showing. The life stories from research participants not wanting children suggest that the symbolic feature of children as one's major resource of elder support has been shaken by the changing notion of parent-child relations under socio-economic changes. Non-heterosexual people's motivation for having children were often unconsolidated and represented in both an individualistic sense as self-desire and a moral, relational manner as strengthening intimate relationships. To have children is, therefore, "also about being a family, being together with children, and having someone to refer to as one's own" (Folger 2008:135). Overall, non-heterosexual people's investment in parenting shouldn't be interpreted as being exclusively traditional or modern as their practices don't occupy such binary.

There are many ways to become a parent for Chinese non-heterosexual people, but they may not be recognised equally in terms of feasibility and moral values. The practices of entering heterosexual marriage and surrogacy adopted by non-heterosexual people can

lead to conflicting moral interpretations in queer social circles and the wider society. Some non-heterosexual people entered *zhihun* (marrying an opposite-sex straight person) or *xinghun* (gay-lesbian contract marriage) to have children. The practice of *pianhun* (lying to marry an opposite-sex straight person mainly for the purpose of having offspring) has encountered increasing moral criticisms under the coming-out advocacy and feminist movements and is vanishing among younger generations in big cities. Non-heterosexual people's motivations for entering *xinghun* marriage could be linked not only to marriage pressure but also their desires to be parents that complied with the state regulation and the image of a heteronormative family. Yet, co-parenting with one's *xinghun* partner reveals the complex interplay of legal policies, gender norms, and moral values, as non-heterosexual people in *xinghun* marriages struggle to walk the blurred line between 'nominal' and 'real' marriages. When *zhihun* or *xinghun* marriage came to an end, the custody of children often became the major divorce dispute.

In the case of non-heterosexual people adopting children, biological tie with children could still be essentially important, as the existing policy regarding adoption in Chinese child welfare centres doesn't recognise non-heterosexual people as suitable parents. The practice of *guoji* adoption from family relatives saves non-heterosexual people from the first step of gaining permission from the child welfare centre as a state institution and eliminates moral dispute. Nevertheless, going through the relevant legal procedures can still produce discomfort and uncertainty around parenthood for queer parents.

Against this backdrop, using ART alone without entering any form of heterosexual marriage has been constructed by non-heterosexual people and organisations work for or sponsored by ART businesses as the seeming ideal option for non-heterosexual people, especially same-sex couples, to establishing co-parenting relationships. However, it is only available to upper-middle-class people who can afford the high cost of childbirth and parenting and whose careers are unlikely to be affected by organisational and social policies. In the case of same-sex couples desiring children together, the children can only be legally bonded to one of them, which they need to strategically overcome to address their needs. Moreover, the online debates on the practice of surrogacy have been linked closely to gender inequality, which further sparks debates on gay fatherhood and same-sex marriage. For many young women in

urban China who are concerned about the gender privilege gay men held, gay men were only innocent when they didn't show any desire to reproduce and completely abandoned their existing gender privilege. On the other hand, the Chinese ART companies entering the pink money market attempt to re-phrase their IVF and surrogacy services as doing good deeds and link their business with queer organisations, though issues on gender and class inequalities are still present in the ART industry. The relation between LGBT organisations and the ART industry therefore encompasses not only sexuality, but class, kinship, and gender concerns.

The dynamic interrelations between same-sex relationship and queer parenting practices signify the elasticity of kinship in today's urban China. The idea of blood and biology still holds its centrality in Chinese family life, as most non-heterosexual people conceptualise blood ties, especially parent-child blood relations, as the central and authentic form of kin relations. The conceptions of biology/blood and the legal implications of parentage/custody together have shaped the distinction between 'my own children' and 'my partner's children', hence creating challenges for queer people to balance their kinship responsibilities as children, parents, and partners. The emerging use of ART and the disputes raised by the alleged distinction between biological and social parenthood for queer couples stresses the very uncertainty of queer kinship that exists with the ambiguity of state law and everyday heteronormative family norms in Chinese society and around the world (e.g., Boyce 2014, Goodfellow 2015). At the same time, the various parenting and co-parenting practices documented in this research demonstrate the mobilising possibilities beyond the singular definition of blood relatedness, that is, (co-)parenthood being constructed and strengthened using the language of bodily experience (carrying the baby in one's body /*qinsheng*) and affective recognition (conjugal/parental love). In the cases of *guoji* adoption and using the egg/sperm of same-sex partners' relatives, the idea of kinship roles is also mobilised as one form of kinship is being used to establish another one. Concisely, the notions of blood and its centrality in patrilineal continuity alone doesn't work to achieve or destruct queer co-parenting relationship; rather, it was the queer subject's capability to eliminate the involvement of a third biological or legal parent outside their intimate relationship, to negotiate with the uncertainties caused by state policies, to secure well-off life in cities like Shenzhen, and to handle their parents' attitude toward their co-parenting relationships.

At the same time, the parent-child relations for non-heterosexual people have become more fluid both in terms of emotional and physical distance. As an increasing number of young non-heterosexual people only come back home during national holidays, their connections with distant relatives weaken and their relationship with their parents tend to be stretched and elastic (Wei 2020). The emerging ‘reverse union’ and ‘small family’ further point to elastic meanings of family and relative in contemporary Chinese cities.

The imagination of the queer family in today’s urban China is characterised by many voices under rapid social and family transformations. Queer individuals from different social backgrounds and generations, LGBT non-profit organisations, same-sex dating apps, and ART agencies have all contributed to the discursive and dynamic understandings of the queer/*tongzhi*/rainbow family. For different individuals and organisations, queer family can include family modes that are radically different from and conforming to the hegemonic hetero-reproductive family model. There is no singular version of family-forming processes among Chinese non-heterosexual people, as one may have a ‘normative’ past (enter a *xinghun* marriage and have children) before their ‘queer’ present and future (coming out to one’s parents and finding a same-sex partner form a queer family). Thus, it is vital not to make a unified characterisation of the Chinese modalities of the queer family as if they have a universally impervious essence. The diverse Chinese modalities of the queer family challenge the universalist assumption of queer modernity that only exists in the form of being out and progressive and in the sense of straight, linear time. In this sense, the various forms of Chinese queer families obscure the Western-Chinese, past-present, and tradition-modern binaries. By capturing the emerging family-forming practices and the image of the role-model queer/rainbow nuclear family promoted in queer communities, this thesis stresses the dynamic interplay of socio-economical class, state law and moral values that come to articulate intimate and family relations in today’s queer everyday lives.

At this point, it is crucial to unpack the two major types of moral discourse going on in Chinese queer life-worlds, which constantly shape life choices. The first discourse is constructed by the state policies and Confucian familism, and is often referred to as the ‘tradition’ ideology. It suggests that one has no other choice but to fulfil family duties through entering a heterosexual marriage, having biological children, and taking good

care of family elders. The second discourse is arguably constructed by LGBT organisations and Western-originated queer coming-out politics, and is often regarded as the ‘modern’ ideology. It asks one to embrace an out and progressive lifestyle that attacks heteronormative kinship norms and meanwhile, being a good sexual citizen (Rofel 2007). These two discourses seem to be in radical conflict at first glance, while this ethnography demonstrates how queer individuals seek to find negotiating spaces from the blurred boundaries between the two discourses. Furthermore, queer utopian aspirations are marked by both discourses.

The younger generations of non-heterosexual people in urban China endorse and make use of the rising emphasis on personal privacy to create and maintain same-sex relationships. Yet, personal privacy cannot be conflated with individual freedom, as their choices are not free but constantly conditioned by the existing familial and moral values and socio-legal systems; queer youth is haunted by the anxiety (lack of security) about their same-sex intimate relationships, parental acceptance, and elder life. Being financially capable and therefore being able to negotiate with one’s parents for familial acceptance is highlighted by non-heterosexual people of all ages.

The life trajectories of middle-aged non-heterosexual migrants successfully settling in Shenzhen and establishing a queer form of family/*jia* embodies queer utopian imaginaries for futurity. I concur with Jones that we need to look further to the tension between the “queer struggle for a bearable life and aspirational hopes for a good life” (2013:2). For the non-heterosexual youth who desires a modern queer lifestyle and committed same-sex relationships in cosmopolitan cities like Shenzhen, the rising living expense and tightening upward mobility, in addition to legal constraints, have inevitably shaped their material desires, career and parenting choices, and future aspirations. We must acknowledge that the ability to live a completely honest and out life and to establish a recognisable queer family in Chinese society remained a class-specific privilege. In today’s urban China, having a perfect queer family is not something unimaginable anymore, but such imageries, so tightly bounded with class position, remains unaffordable for many.

Lastly, it should be acknowledged that the ‘queering’ of kinship is not perceived within only the scope of non-normative sexual desires but exists in every aspect of the society

at large. For example, increased social tolerance toward divorce and single parenting has also reduced social constraints for queer parents to raise children. Non-heterosexual people in this ethnography share struggles and uncertainties with straight Chinese people in non-normative intimate and family relationships such as DINK (double income no kids) families, single parenthood, unmarried, and polygamous relationships. Heterosexual relationships that fall out of the hetero-reproductive nuclear family category and often don't/can't rely on the authoritative recognitions (e.g., biogenetical reproduction or marriage), also indicate possibilists to queer the dominant Chinese kinship discourses, despite lack of visibility (e.g., Liang 2012). The various arrangements of queer conjugal love, parenting, and families in urban China have made explicit the malleability and contingency of Chinese kinship, in that way also blurred the symbolic distinctiveness of 'Chinese' kinship and 'queer' kinship. Knowledge of both kinship points to transformation that is situated in the interplay of cultural, legal, and economic institutions.

Viewing themselves as 'ordinary (*putong*)' Chinese citizens and modern consumers, the queer couples and parents I met in urban China attempted to secure their ideal future lives and relationships, not by altering structural factors or pursuing marriage and reproduction rights as a coherent group, but rather by gaining personal agency and purchasing power to negotiate existing legal and social difficulties. In other words, both success and failure to form lasting intimate relationships and family were internalised as personal matters, infused with the language of personal agency and individual choice. Their tactics for forming durable queer relationships were also technologies to minimise risks in the foreseen future. Yet, I read their choices and struggles as both individual and contextual, as they had a lot to do with the historical and social-legal context (Taylor 2010, Mizielińska & Stasińska 2017, Heberer 2017, Hildebrandt 2018). In my interpretation, the tactics excised by 'ordinary' queer Chinese citizens were neither radical nor directly anti-normative in terms of challenging heteronormative conventions and state institutions. However, they still queer and mobilise the meaning of kinship in subtle, nonlinear ways. The hegemonic heteronormative discourses were followed and enforced at some life moments and spaces, and were destabilised and transformed at others. Ultimately, what should be read as normal and what should be read as queer is constantly changing (Weiss 2016, Lewin 2016). This ethnography reflects Muñoz's argument that queerness is performative, a doing rather than being, and queerness's time

is a “stepping out of the linearity of straight time” (2009:25). What shall be reconsidered in queer life-worlds and methodology is the seemingly well-defined ordinary-queer or transgression-assimilation dichotomies, as queer kinship practices encompass both interpretations in shifting contexts.

In short, the practices of queer conjugal relationships, parenting, and family formation documented in this research suggest innovative and diverse forms of belonging, family, and relatedness beyond blood ties and the heterosexual nuclear family; at the same time, class stratification and gender inequalities are often reproduced during these processes. Queer relationships and families emerged both within and outside the dominant kinship norms co-constructed by the existing state policy and Confucian familism. In the context of socio-economic transformations and the technologization of biological reproduction, queer futurity and queer utopian imaginaries are made vivid and made normalised by state-constructed modernity and glocal market. Queer relationships in China are transforming and should not be defined as imitative or alternative to blood ties. Non-heterosexual people’s practices of forming durable relationships and family both reproduce and transgress the dominant assumptions about blood relatedness and its centrality in the family-forming progress.

Bibliography

- Adam, B. D., Willem, D., Duyvendak, J. W., & Krouwel, A. (Eds.). (2009). *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*. Temple University Press.
- Altman, D. (1996). Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identities. *Social Text*, (48), 77-94.
- Altork, K. (1995) Walking the Fire Line: The Erotic Dimension of the Fieldwork Experience. In D. Kulick & M. Willson (Eds.), *Taboo: Sex, Identity, and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Altorki, S., & El-Solh, C. F. (1988). *Arab Women in the Field: Studying Your Own Society*. Syracuse University Press.
- An, Q., Chen, Y. & Zhi, L. (2013). Zhongguo chuantong “jiaguotonggou” yu meiguo “gerenzhuayi” de shehuigongneng [Chinese] [Social functions of Chinese pan-familism and American individualism]. *Yunnan Keji Guanli Magazine*, (3). 64-65.
- Anagnost, A. (2008). From ‘Class’ to ‘Social Strata’: grasping the social totality in reform-era China. *Third World Quarterly*, 29(3), 497-519.
- Anu, Kumar, P., Inder, D., & Sharma, N. (2013). Surrogacy and women’s right to health in India: Issues and perspective. *Indian Journal of Public Health*, 57(2), 65. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-557X.114984>
- A-Yan. (2019, December 22). Gei tonghun hefahua toule fandui piao. [Chinese] [I voted against the legalisation of same-sex marriage]. Retrieved 20 January 2020, from <https://www.douban.com/group/topic/161487038/>
- Bao, S., Bodvarsson, Ö. B., Hou, J. W., & Zhao, Y. (2011). The Regulation of Migration in a Transition Economy: China’s Hukou System. *Contemporary Economic Policy*, 29(4), 564–579. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-7287.2010.00224.x>
- Bao, H. (2018). *Queer Comrades: Gay Identity and Tongzhi Activism in Postsocialist China*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.
- Beauvoir, S. (1953). *The Second Sex*. Translated and edited by H.M. Parshley. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Being LGBT in China - A National Survey on Social Attitudes toward Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression. (2016). United Nations Development Programme.
- Berlant, L. (1998). Intimacy: A Special Issue. *Critical Inquiry*, 24(2), 281–288. JSTOR.
- Bersani, L. (1987). Is the Rectum a Grave? *October*, 43, 197–222.
- Blackwood, E. (1995). Falling in love with an-Other lesbian: Reflections on identity in fieldwork. In D. Kulick & M. Willson (Eds.), *Taboo: sex, identity, and erotic subjectivity in anthropological fieldwork*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Blackwood, E. (2005). *Tombois* in West Sumatra: Constructing Masculinity and Erotic Desire. In Robertson, J. and Wiley InterScience. (Eds) 2005. *Same-Sex Cultures and Sexualities: An Anthropological Reader* (Blackwell Readers in Anthropology; 6). Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.

- Boellstorff, T. (2007a). *A Coincidence of Desires: Anthropology, Queer Studies, Indonesia*. Durham [NC]: Duke University Press.
- Boellstorff, T. (2007b). Queer Studies in the House of Anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 36, 17-35.
- Boellstorff, T. (2010). Queer techne: Two theses on methodology and queer studies. In Browne, K., & Nash, C. J. (eds.). *Queer methods and methodologies: Intersecting queer theories and social science research*, 215-30. Taylor & Francis.
- Borneman, J. (1997). Caring and being cared for: displacing marriage, kinship, gender and sexuality. *International Social Science Journal*, 49(154), 573-584.
- Bose, B., & Bhattacharyya, S. (Eds.). (2007). *The phobic and the erotic: The politics of sexualities in contemporary India*. London: Seagull.
- Boyce, P. (2008). Truths and (Mis)representations: Adrienne Rich, Michel Foucault and Sexual Subjectivities in India. *Sexualities*, 11(1-2), 110-119.
- Boyce, P. (2014). Desirable rights: Same-sex sexual subjectivities, socio-economic transformations, global flows and boundaries – in India and beyond. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 16(10), 1201-1215.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2014.944936>
- Boyce, P., & Dasgupta, R. K. (2017). Utopia or Elsewhere: Queer Modernities in Small Town West Bengal. *Urban Utopias*, 209-225.
- Boyce, P., Engebretsen, E. L., & Posocco, S. (2018). Introduction: anthropology's queer sensibilities. *Sexualities*, 21(5-6), 843-852.
- Boyce, P., Gonzalez-Polledo, E. J., & Posocco, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Queering Knowledge: Analytics, Devices, and Investments after Marilyn Strathern*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Brandtstädter, S., & Santos, G. D. (Eds.). (2008). *Chinese Kinship: Contemporary Anthropological Perspectives*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Browne, K., & Nash, C. J. (Eds.). (2010). *Queer methods and methodologies: Intersecting queer theories and social science research*. Taylor & Francis.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315603223>
- Butler, J. (1990) [2006]. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2nd ed., Routledge classics Y). New York; London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2002). Is kinship always already heterosexual? *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 13(1), 14-44.
- Butler, J. and Salih, S. (2004). *The Judith Butler Reader*. Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cadoret, A. (2009). The contribution of homoparental families to the current debate on kinship. *European Kinship in the Age of Biotechnology*, 79-96.
- Callaway, H. (1992). Ethnography and experience: Gender implications in fieldwork and texts. In *Anthropology and autobiography*, 29, 49.

- Carsten, J. (2003). *After Kinship* (New Departures in Anthropology). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511800382
- Carsten, J. (2013). What kinship does—And how. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 3(2), 245–251. <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau3.2.013>
- Carsten, J. (Ed.). (2000). *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chao, Y. A. (1999). Performing like a p'o and acting as a big sister: Reculturating into the indigenous lesbian circle in Taiwan. In *Sex, sexuality, and the anthropologist*, 128-144. University of Illinois Press.
- Chan, K. W., & Zhang, L. (1999). The *Hukou* System and Rural-Urban Migration in China: Processes and Changes. *The China Quarterly*, 160, 818–855. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000001351>
- Chen, X. 28 December 2014. Jiemi xingxue yanjiu [Chinese] [Demystifying Sexuality Studies]. *Vistastory*. Available from: <http://www.vistastory.com/a/201412/16839.html> [accessed 10 May 2015]
- Chen, Yaya & Chen, Yiqing. (2007). Lesbians in China's Mainland. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. 10:3-4, 113-125.
- Choi, S. Y., & Luo, M. (2016). Performative family: Homosexuality, marriage and intergenerational dynamics in China. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 67(2), 260–280. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12196>
- Chou, W. (1997). *Houzhimin Tongzhi*. [Chinese] [Post-Colonial Tongzhi] Hong Kong: Hong Kong Tongzhi Yanjiushe.
- Chou, W. (2001). *Tongzhi: Politics of same-sex eroticism in Chinese societies*. New York, N.Y.
- Cohen, A. P. (1992). Self-conscious anthropology. *Anthropology and autobiography*, 221-241.
- Cohen, M. L. (2005). *Kinship, Contract, Community, and State: Anthropological Perspectives on China*. Stanford University Press.
- Collier, J. F., & Yanagisako, S. J. (Eds.). (1987). *Gender and Kinship: Essays Toward a Unified Analysis*. Stanford University Press.
- Constable, N. (2009). The Commodification of Intimacy: Marriage, Sex, and Reproductive Labor. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 38(1), 49–64.
- Das, V. (1995). National Honor and Practical Kinship: Unwanted Women and Children. *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction*, 2124-33.
- Dave, N. (2012). *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics*. Durham [NC]: Duke University Press.
- Davies, C. A. (2008). *Reflexive ethnography: A guide to researching selves and others*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Dempsey, D. (2010) Conceiving and Negotiating Reproductive Relationships: Lesbians and Gay Men Forming Families with Children, *Sociology* 44(6): 1145-62.

- Deng, L. (2015). Guanyu zuxianchongbai wenhua de sikao [Chinese] [Thoughts about ancestor worship cultures]. *Hongwang* [online]. 9 February. Available from <http://ldhn.rednet.cn/c/2015/02/09/3599562.htm> [accessed 9 June 2015].
- DeWalt, K. M., & DeWalt, B. R. (2010). *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. AltaMira Press.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/suss/detail.action?docID=1021969>
- Ding & Gayspot. (2018, March 7). Jiyou shengyuguan ji daiyun diaochabaogao. [Chinese] [Opinions on reproduction and surrogacy among gay men]. Retrieved 21 January 2020, from http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MjM5NDQzNTM0MQ==&mid=2654191997&idx=1&sn=58eab2b32d1d0c8d0000a1000a46be5f&chksm=bd40b91f8a373009fd62bdfcecb082d5af5e037a4e34e39b063ead744ee2d8f305dbcc11207a#rd
- Ding, C. (2015). Surrogacy litigation in China and beyond. *Journal of Law and the Biosciences*, 2(1), 33–55. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jlb/lisu036>
- Dixia daiyun heilian diaocha: 14 sui shaonv beipian mailuan, 85wan yitiaolong baochenggong. [Chinese] [Investigation of Underground Black Chain Surrogacy Business: 14-year-old teenage girl being tricked into selling her eggs, 850,000 RMB for guaranteed one-stop service]. (2018, August 8). *The Paper*. Retrieved 9 January 2020, from https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2321731
- Duggan, L. (2002). The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism. *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, 10, 9780822383901-007.
- Edelman, L. (2004). *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>
- Engelbrechtsen, E. L., & Schroeder, W. F. (Eds.). (2015). Queer/Tongzhi China: New Perspectives on Research, Activism and Media Cultures. *Gendering Asia*, 11.
- Engelbrechtsen, E.L. (2008). *Love in a big city: Sexuality, kinship, and citizenship amongst lala ('lesbian') women in Beijing*. DPhil. London School of Economics and Political Science United Kingdom.
- Engelbrechtsen, E.L. (2009). Intimate practices, conjugal ideals: Affective ties and relationship strategies among lala (lesbian) women in contemporary Beijing. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, 6(3), 3-14
- Engelbrechtsen, E.L. (2014). *Queer Women in Urban China*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Engelbrechtsen, E.L. (2017). Under Pressure: Lesbian-Gay Contract Marriages and Their Patriarchal Bargains. In Santos, G., & Harrell, S. (eds). *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century*. University of Washington Press.
- Eriksen, T. H. (2010). *Small places, Large issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* (3rd ed., Anthropology, culture, and society Y). London: Pluto.
- Fan, E. L. (2017). Counting results: Performance-based financing and HIV testing among MSM in China. *Critical Public Health*, 27(2), 217–227.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2016.1259458>

- Fei, X., Hamilton, G. G., & Zheng, W. (1992). *From the soil: The foundations of Chinese society*. University of California Press.
- Fincher, L.H. (2014). *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China*. London: Zed Books
- Fitzgerald, T. K. (1999). Identity in Ethnography: Limits to Reflective Subjectivity. *Sex, Sexuality and the Anthropologist*, 117-127.
- Folger, T. (2008). Queer Nuclear Families? Reproducing and Transgressing Heteronormativity. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 54(1-2), 124-149.
- Fong, V. L. (2004). *Only Hope: Coming of Age Under China's One-Child Policy*. Stanford University Press.
- Fong, V. L. (2007). Morality, Cosmopolitanism, or Academic Attainment? Discourses on 'Quality' and Urban Chinese-Only-Children's Claims to Ideal Personhood. *City and Society*. 19 (1), 86–113.
- Foucault, M. (1984) [1990]. *The History of Sexuality* (Penguin History Y). London: Penguin.
- Franklin, S. (2013). *Biological Relatives: IVF, Stem Cells, and the Future of Kinship*. Durham [NC]: Duke University Press.
- Franklin, S., & McKinnon, S. (Eds.). (2001). *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*. Durham [NC]: Duke University Press.
- Franklin, S., Posocco, S., Boyce, P., & Gonzalez-Polledo, E. J. (2019). Conceptuality in Relation. In *Queering Knowledge* (pp. 168-181). London; New York: Routledge.
- Fu, X. (2015). Market economy, spatial transformation, and sexual diversity: An ethnographic study of the gay community in Shenyang, North China. In *Queer/Tongzhi China: New Perspectives on Research, Activism and Media Cultures*, 217-44.
- Gabrielson, M.L. (2011) We Have to Create Family: Aging Support Issues and Needs among Older Lesbians, *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 23(3): 322-34.
- Gammeltoft, T. (2014). *Haunting Images: A Cultural Account of Selective Reproduction in Vietnam*. University of California Press.
- Gearing, J. (1995). Fear and loving in the West Indies. Research from the heart (as well as the head). In D. Kulick & M. Willson (Eds.), *Taboo: Sex, Identity, and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Goodfellow, A. (2015). *Gay Fathers, Their Children, and the Making of Kinship*. Fordham University Press.
- Grace. (2012). Les shaoshupai baogao [Chinese] [Les minorities report]. Lunwenwang [online]. Available from <http://www.xzbu.com/6/view-1184869.htm> [accessed 1 May 2015]
- Grant, B. (2012). Gender, in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions* (ed R. L. Nadeau), John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester, UK
- Greenhalgh, S. (2003). Planned births, unplanned persons: 'Population' in the making of Chinese modernity. *American Ethnologist*, 30(2), 196–215.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2003.30.2.196>

- Greely, H. T. (2016). *The end of sex and the future of human reproduction*. Harvard University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctt1d4tzfg>
- Greenhalgh, S. (1985). Sexual Stratification: The Other Side of 'Growth with Equity' in East Asia. *Population and Development Review* 11: 265-314
- Grewal, I., & Kaplan, I. (2001). Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 7, 663 - 679.
- Gusterson, H. (1997). Studying Up Revisited. *PoLAR: Political Legal Anthropology Review*, 20(1), 114-119.
- Halberstam, J. (2008). The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies. *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, 5(2), 140-156.
- Halberstam, J. (2011). *The Queer Art of Failure* (E-Duke books scholarly collection). Durham [NC]: Duke University Press.
- Han, S. & Li, S. (2006). On the effect of educational sex socialization on the female in our country. *Journal of Fuqing Branch of Fujian University*. 77(6). 61-64
- Handwerker, L. (2002). The politics of making modern babies in China. In *Infertility around the globe: New thinking on childlessness, gender, and reproductive technologies*, 298-315. University of California Press.
- Hastrup, K. (1992). Writing ethnography: State of the Art. in *Anthropology and autobiography*, 29, 115.
- Hayden, C. P. (1995). Gender, genetics, and generation: Reformulating biology in lesbian kinship. *Cultural anthropology*, 10(1), 41-63.
- He, T. (2017, April 17). Jiefu shengzi: buweirenzhi qie luanxiangcongsheng de dixia daiyun shichang [Chinese] [Borrowing womb: unknown and chaotic underground surrogacy chain]. *GQ Magazine*. Retrieved 25 February 2019, from http://www.gq.com.cn/magazine/news_1824fffa8788a99b.html
- He, Q. 2000. China's Listing Social Structure. *New Left Review*, 5, 69.
- Heberer, F-M. (2017). Migrating intimacies: Media representations of same-sex love among migrant women in East Asia. *Sexualities*, 20(4), 428-445.
- Hendriks, T. (2018). 'Erotiques Cannibales': A Queer Ontological Take on Desire from Urban Congo. *Sexualities*, 21(5-6), 853-867. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460716677283>
- Hildebrandt, T. (2018). The One-Child Policy, Elder Care, and LGB Chinese: A Social Policy Explanation for Family Pressure. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 0(0), 1-19.
- Hinsch, B. (1990). *Passion of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Ho, L.W.W. (2010). *Gay and Lesbian Subculture in Urban China*. London: Routledge.
- Hockey, J., & Forsey, M. (2012). Ethnography is not participant observation: Reflections on the interview as participatory qualitative research. In *The interview: An Ethnographic Approach*, 69-87.
- Huang, A. (2015). On the surface: 'T' and Transgender Identity in Chinese Lesbian Culture. In *Queer/Tongzhi China: New Perspectives on Research, Activism and*

- Media Cultures*, edited by Elisabeth Engebretsen, William Schroeder, and Hongwei Bao, 111, 30.
- Huang, A. (2017). Precariousness and the Queer Politics of Imagination in China. *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 58(2), 226–242.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14735784.2017.1287580>
- Huang, S., & Brouwer, D. C. (2018). Coming out, coming home, coming with: Models of queer sexuality in contemporary China. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 11(2), 97–116.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2017.1414867>
- Ikels, C (Ed.). (2004). *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*. Stanford University Press.
- Inhorn, M. C., & Birenbaum-Carmeli, D. (2008). Assisted Reproductive Technologies and Culture Change. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 37(1), 177–196.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.37.081407.085230>
- Jackson, S. (2005). Sexuality, Heterosexuality and Gender Hierarchy: Getting our Priorities Straight. In Ingraham, C. (ed). *Thinking Straight: The Power, the Promise, and the Paradox of Heterosexuality*, London; New York: Routledge.
- Jackson, S. (2016). Interchanges: Gender, Sexuality and Heterosexuality. *Feminist Theory*. 7(1).
- Jamieson, L. (2011). Intimacy as a Concept: Explaining Social Change in the Context of Globalisation or Another Form of Ethnocentrism? *Sociological Research Online*, 16(4), 151–163. <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.2497>
- Jankowiak, W. & Li, X. (2017). Emergent Conjugal Love, Mutual Affection, and Female Power. In Santos, G., & Harrell, S. (eds). *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century*. University of Washington Press.
- Jankowiak, W. R. (2008). Practicing Connectiveness as Kinship in Urban China. In Susanne Brandtstädter & Gonçalo D. Santos (eds), *Chinese Kinship and Relatedness: Some Contemporary Anthropological Perspectives* 67-92. New York: Routledge.
- Ji, Y., Wu, X., Sun, S., & He, G. (2017). Unequal care, unequal work: Toward a more comprehensive understanding of gender inequality in post-reform urban China. *Sex Roles*, 77(11-12), 765-778.
- Jiang, Q., & Liu, Y. (2016). Low fertility and concurrent birth control policy in China. *The History of the Family*, 21(4), 551–577.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2016.1213179>
- Jing, J., Sun, X., & Zhou, P. (2012). Qinmi de moshengren [Chinese] [Intimate Strangers]. *Opentimes*. 8, 106-117.
- Johnson, N. B. (1984). Sex, Color, and Rites of Passage In Ethnographic Research. *Human Organization*, 43(2), 108–120.
- Jones, A. (2013). *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>
- Kam, L.Y. L. (2013). *Shanghai Lalas: Female Tongzhi Communities and Politics in Urban China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

- Kennedy, E. & Davis, M. (1992). "They was no one to mess with": The construction of the butch role in the lesbian community of the 1940s and 1950s. In Joan Nestle, (ed). *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch reader*. Boston: Alyson Publications.
- Khanna, A. (2017). *Sexualness*. New Text.
- Klein, K. (2017). Assisted Reproductive Technologies, Sperm Donation, And Biological Kinship: A Recent Chinese Media Debate. In Santos G. & Harrell S. (Eds.), *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 219-233). Seattle; London: University of Washington Press.
- Kleinman, A., Yan, Y., Jun, J., Lee, S., Zhang, E., Tianshu, P., Jinhua, G. (2011). *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person* (1st ed.). University of California Press.
- Kondo, D. K. (1990). 'M. Butterfly': Orientalism, Gender, and a Critique of Essentialist Identity. *Cultural Critique*, (16), 5–29.
- Kong, T. S. K. (2010). *Chinese Male Homosexualities*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Kong, T. S. K. (2019). Be a Responsible and Respectable Man: Two Generations of Chinese Gay Men Accomplishing Masculinity in Hong Kong. *Men and Masculinities*, 1097184X19859390. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X19859390>
- Kulick, D., & Willson, M. (Eds.). (1995). *Taboo: Sex, Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Latour, B. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern*. Harvard University Press.
- Lee, H. (2006). *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*. Stanford University Press.
- Lee, H. (2014). *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*. Stanford University Press.
- LegalDaily. (2019, July 17). Daiyun heise chanyelian diaocha [Chinese] [Investigation on the Surrogacy Black Industry Chain] Retrieved 12 February 2020, from http://www.legaldaily.com.cn/index_article/content/2019-07/16/content_7935077.htm
- Lewin, E. (2016). Who's Queer? What's Queer? Queer Anthropology through the Lens of Ethnography. *Cultural Anthropology*, 31(4), 598–606. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca31.4.08>
- Lewin, E. and Leap, W. L. (Ed). (1996). *Out in the Field: Reflections of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists*. University of Illinois Press.
- Lewin, E., Leap, W. L., & Newton, E. (Eds.). (2002). *Out in Theory*. University of Illinois Press.
- Li, X. (2007). Nvtongxinglian xingbie rentong he shenfen rentong yanjiu [Chinese] [Lesbian gender identity and role identity research]. *Zhongguo Xingkexue*, 16(5), 6–9.
- Li, X., Zhang, B., Wang, J., Li, Y., Li, X., Yu, P., Liu, M., & Liu, X. (2017). The Sexual health status of women who have regular sexual relations with men who have sex with men in mainland China. *BMC Public Health*, 17(1), 168. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-017-4096-z>
- Li, Y. (1998). *Tongxinglian Yawenhua* [Chinese] [Homosexual Subculture]. Neimenggu, China: Neimenggu University Press.

- Li, Y. (2011a). Gongzhong dui tongxinglian de taidu [Chinese] [Public attitude toward homosexuality]. *Wangyi* [online]. 23 February. Available from <http://lady.163.com/11/0223/16/6TJE6B4C002626I3.html> [accessed 1 May 2015].
- Li, Y. (2011b). Changes of family structure and family relation based on investigation in Lanzhou. *Gansu Social Sciences*. (1). 6-12.
- Li, Y. and Wang, X. (1992). *Tamen de shijie* [Chinese] [Their World]. Shanxi, China: Shanxi People's Press.
- Liang, Z. (2012). "DINK" Family: Young People's Fashion? ——An International Comparative Study. *Youth Studies*, 05.
- Lin, X. (2019). "Purchasing hope": The consumption of children's education in urban China. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology*, 6(1), 8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-019-0099-8>
- Lin, Y and Xu, J. (2013). Chunjie cheng chugui gaofengqi [Chinese] [Spring Festival is the peak time for coming out]. *Xinhua Wang* [online]. 15 January. Available from http://www.zj.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/jiankang/2013-01/15/c_114369516.htm [accessed 1 May 2015].
- Liu, P. (2010). Why Does Queer Theory Need China? *Positions : East Asia Cultures Critique*, 18(2), 291-320.
- Liu, T. (2016). Neoliberal ethos, state censorship and sexual culture: A Chinese dating/hook-up app. *Continuum*, 30(5), 557–566. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2016.1210794>
- Lo, I. P. Y. (2020). Family formation among lalas (lesbians) in urban China: Strategies for forming families and navigating relationships with families of origin. *Journal of Sociology*, 1440783320912828. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783320912828>
- Lunsing, W. (1999). Japan: Finding Its Way? In Adam B., Duyvendak J., & Krouwel A. (Eds.), *Global Emergence of Gay & Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*. (pp. 293-325). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Luo, M. (2020). Sexuality, migration and family: Understanding Jia and its impact on Chinese young gay men's migration motives from a temporal perspective. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 0(0), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1821615>
- Malinowski, B. (1922). *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. George Routledge & Sons.
- Malinowski, B. (1984) [2006]. Method and scope of anthropological fieldwork. In Robben, A. C. G. M., & Sluka, J. A. (Eds.). *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader* (1 edition). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mamo, L. (2007). *Queering Reproduction: Achieving Pregnancy in the Age of Technoscience*. Durham [NC]: Duke University Press.
- Mamo, L., & Alston-Stepnitz, E. (2015). Queer Intimacies and Structural Inequalities: New Directions in Stratified Reproduction. *Journal of Family Issues*, 36(4), 519–540. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X14563796>
- Manalansan, M. F. (2003). *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*. Durham [NC]: Duke University Press.
- Meinert, L., & Grøn, L. (2019). 'It Runs in the Family'. Exploring Contagious Kinship

- Connections. *Ethnos*, 0(0), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2019.1640759>
- Miller, D., & Slater, D. (2003). Ethnography and the extreme internet. In T. H. Eriksen (Ed.), *Globalisation* (pp. 39–57). Pluto Press; JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fs8zb.6>
- Miller, D., Sinanan, J., Wang, X., McDonald, T., Haynes, N., Costa, E., Spyer, J., Venkatraman, S., & Nicolescu, R. (2016). *How the World Changed Social Media*. UCL Press. <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781910634493>
- Mills, E. (2018). Gender, Sexuality and the limits of the law. *Global Discourse*, 8(3), 473–484. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2018.1521099>
- Mills, M. B. (1999). *Thai Women in the Global Labor Force*. Rutgers University Press.
- Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China. (2001a, February 19). “Renlei fuzhu shengzhi jishu guanli banfa” [No. 14, Regulations for the administration of human-assisted reproductive technology]. National Health Commission of the PRC. Retrieved 14 November 2018, from <http://www.nhc.gov.cn/zwgk/wlwl/200804/56c333396f3b4e2ab150491c33129f5a.shtml>
- Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China. (2001b, February 20). “Renlei jingzi ku guanli banfa” [No. 15, Regulations for the administration of sperm banks]. National Health Commission of the PRC. Retrieved 14 November 2018, from <http://www.nhc.gov.cn/zwgk/wlwl/200804/fcdabb1240018475297fa008ec05f81c6.shtml>
- Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China. (2013, September 13). “Weishengbu Guanyu Xiuding Renlei Fuzhu Shengzhi Jishu he Renlei Jingzi Ku Xiangguan Jishu Guifan, Jiben Biaozhun, he Lunli Yuanze de Tongzhi” [Notice from the Ministry of Health concerning the revision of the norms, standards, and ethical principles of ART and sperm banks]. National Health Commission of the PRC. Retrieved 14 November 2018, from <http://www.nhc.gov.cn/qjjys/s3581/200805/f69a925d55b44be2a9b4ada7fcddec835.shtml>
- Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China. (2016, April 7). “Weishengbu guanyu yinfa renlei buzhu shengzhi jishu yu renlei jingzi ku jiaoyan shishi xize de tongzhi” [No. 44, on the regulation of human clinical-assisted reproduction technologies and accreditation of human sperm banks]. National Health Commission of the PRC. Retrieved 14 November 2018, from <http://www.nhc.gov.cn/qjjys/s3581/200805/9a008204d0de4500bef53cf313727994.shtml>
- Mizielińska, J. & Stasińska, A. (2017). Beyond the Western Gaze: Families of choice in Poland. *Sexualities*, 0(0)1-19.
- Moore, H. L. (2019). How exactly are we related?. In *Queering Knowledge* (pp. 181-192). London; New York: Routledge.
- Muñoz, J. E. (2009). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>
- Narayan, K. (1993). How native is a ‘native’ anthropologist? *American Anthropologist* 95(3): 671-686.

- Ni zhichi 'tongxinghunyin hefahua' xieru minfadian ma? [Chinese] [Do you support the legalisation of same-sex marriage in civil code?]. *Ifeng.com*. Retrieved 21 January 2020, from <http://news.ifeng.com/survey.shtml?from=timeline&isappinstalled=0#id=15990>
- Okely, J., & Callaway, H. (1992). *Anthropology and autobiography*. London; New York: Routledge. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=181714>
- Osburg, J. (2013). *Anxious Wealth*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.
- Osella, F. (2012). Malabar Secrets: South Indian Muslim Men's (Homo)sociality across the Indian Ocean. *Asian Studies Review*, 36(4), 531–549.
- Pan, L. (2015). *When True Love Came to China*. HK: Hong Kong University Press.
- Pan, S. (1995). *Zhongguo xing xianzhuang* [Chinese] [The Reality of Sexuality in China]. Beijing: Guangming ribao.
- Parreñas, R. S. (2017). Introduction: Special Issue on Technologies of Intimate Labour. *Sexualities*, 20(4), 407–411.
- Patel, G. (2006). Risky Subjects: Insurance, Sexuality, and Capital. *Social Text*, 24(489), 25–65.
- Pimentel, E. E. (2000). Just How Do I Love Thee?: Marital Relations in Urban China. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(1), 32–47.
- Povinelli, E. A. (2002). Notes on Gridlock: Genealogy, Intimacy, Sexuality. *Public Culture*, 14(1), 215–238.
- Povinelli, E. A. (2006). *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*. Durham [NC]: Duke University Press.
- Riley, N. E. (1994). Interwoven Lives: Parents, Marriage, and Guanxi in China. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 56(4), 791–803.
- Rizhaoyaojin. (2019, May 17). Wo shenzhi kaishi huaiyin, nantong quanli shangsheng hou, huichengwei yapo nvxing de toubuliliang. [Chinese] [I event start to doubt, the rise of the male homosexual right, will be the primary suppressing power to women]. Retrieved 13 February 2020, from <https://www.douban.com/group/topic/140896557/>
- Robben, A. C. G. M., & Sluka, J. A. (Eds.). (2006). *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader* (1st edition). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Rofel, L. (2007). *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Perverse Modernities Y). Durham [N.C.]; London: Duke University Press.
- Rubin, G. (2002). Studying Sexual Subcultures: Excavating the Ethnography of Gay Communities in Urban North America. In Lewin, E., Leap, W.L. (eds) 2002. *Out in Theory*. University of Illinois Press.
- Rudrappa, S. (2018). Why Is India's Ban on Commercial Surrogacy Bad for Women? *North Carolina Journal of International Law*, 43(4), 70–95.
- Sahlins, M. (2013). *What Kinship Is-And Is Not*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Sang, T.D. (2003). *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China*. Chicago, Ill.; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Santos, G., & Harrell, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century*. University of Washington Press.
- Schensul, S. L., Schensul, J. J., & LeCompte, M. D. (1999). *Essential Ethnographic Methods: Observations, Interviews, and Questionnaires* (Vol. 2). Rowman Altamira.
- Schneider D.M. (1980). *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schroeder, W. F. (2012). Beyond resistance: Gay and lala recreation in Beijing. In *Understanding Global Sexualities* (pp. 120-135). London; New York: Routledge.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (2003). *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy and Performativity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Shen, J. (2013). Increasing internal migration in China from 1985 to 2005: Institutional versus economic drivers. *Habitat International*, 39, 1–7.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2012.10.004>
- Shenzhen Municipal Bureau of Statistics. (2018, December). Shenzhen statistics and information yearbook of 2018. <http://tjj.sz.gov.cn/nj2018/nianjian.html?2018>
- Simpson, B. (1994). Bringing the 'Unclear' Family Into Focus: Divorce and Re-Marriage in Contemporary Britain. *Man*, 29(4), 831–851. JSTOR.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3033971>
- Skinner, J. (Ed.). (2012). *The interview: An ethnographic approach*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>
- Song, J. (2019). The Effect of the Two-Child Policy on China's Fertility. *Modern China Studies; Norfolk*, 26(2), 8–22.
- Sorainen, A. (2015). "Queer Personal Lives, Inheritance Perspectives, and Small Places." *Nordic Journal for Queer Studies – Lambda Nordica*, a special volume on Kinship and Reproduction, 3-4/2015 vol. 19.
- Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant Observation*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Learning.
- Stafford, C. (2000). *Chinese Patriliney and the Cycles of Yang and Laiwang*. In: Carsten, Janet, (ed.) *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 35-54.
- State Council of the People's Republic of China. (2002, August 2). "Shehui fuyangfei zhengshou Guanli banfa" [No.357 The measures for administration of collection of social maintenance fees]. Retrieved 3 July 2020, from http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2002/content_61699.htm
- Stoller, P. (1989). *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Strathern, M. (1992a). *After Nature: English kinship in the Late Twentieth Century*. C.U.P.
- Strathern, M. (1992b). *Reproducing the Future: Anthropology, Kinship and the New Reproductive Technologies*. New York: Routledge.

- Strathern, M. (1996). Cutting the Network. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2(3), 517–535. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3034901>
- Strathern, M. (2004). *Partial connections*. CA: AltaMira Press.
- Strathern, M. (2005). *Kinship, Law and the Unexpected: Relatives are Always a Surprise*. Cambridge University Press.
- Strathern, M. (2011). What is a parent? *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 1(1), 245–278.
- Strathern, M. (2012). Epilogue: Expectations, Auto-narrative and Beyond. In *The Interview: An Ethnographic Approach*, 261–266.
- Sullivan, N. (2003). *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York: New York University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvxcrwj6>
- Tan, L., Jiang, Y. P., & Jiang, A. H. (2006). Report on gender equality and women development in China (1995–2005). *Beijing: Social Sciences Documentation Publishing House*.
- Tang, C. and Chen, W. (2012). Zhongguo chengshi jiating de qinshuguanxi [Chinese] [Kinship in Chinese urban families]. *Jiangsu Social Science*. (2), 92–103.
- Tang, D.T. (2011). *Conditional Spaces: Hong Kong Lesbian Desires and Everyday Life*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Tao, H. (2015). *Lesbians in Mainland China*. MSc. University College London.
- Tasker, F. (2005). Lesbian mothers, gay fathers, and their children: A review. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics: JDBP*, 26(3), 224–40.
- Taylor, Y. (2010). The ‘outness’ of queer: class and sexual intersections. In K. Browne, & C. J. Nash (eds.), *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research* (pp. 69–84). Taylor & Francis.
- Tillmann-Healy, L. M. (2003). Friendship as Method. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9(5), 729–749. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403254894>
- Traub, V. (2008). The Past Is a Foreign Country. In Babayan, K., Najmabadi, A., & Studies, H. U. C. for M. E.(eds). *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations Across Temporal Geographies of Desire*. Harvard CMES.
- Twine, F. W. (2015). *Outsourcing the Womb: Race, Class and Gestational Surrogacy in a Global Market*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Tyler, S. (1986). Post-modern ethnography. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, 122–40.
- Valentine, G. (1993). Negotiating and Managing Multiple Sexual Identities: Lesbian Time-Space Strategies. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 18(2), 237–248. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/622365>
- Walker, A. (1996). Kinship between the lines: the patriline, the concubine and the adopted so in late Imperial China. In Maynes et al. (eds). *Gender, Kinship and Power: A Comparative and Interdisciplinary History*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Wang, K. C. (2019). The price of salt: The capable self in the face of heteronormative marriage pressure in the discourses of the “post-90s” Chinese lesbians. *Chinese*

Journal of Communication.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17544750.2019.1624269>

- Wang, P. (2010). Lun Kongzi de jiaguotonggou guannian [Chinese] [On the Confucius Notion of Isomorphism between State and Home]. *Journal of Jinzhong University*. 27(5). 62-64
- Wang, Q. (2011). Rentong er bu chugui [Chinese] [Well-identified but not coming out]. *China Agricultural University Journal of Social Science Edition*. 28 (4), 142-153
- Watney, S. (1988). *Policing Desire: AIDS, Pornography, and the Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Watson, J. L. (1982). Chinese Kinship Reconsidered: Anthropological Perspectives on Historical Research. *The China Quarterly*, 92, 589–622.
- Wei, J. (2014). Tongzhi Living: Men Attracted to Men in Postsocialist China by Tiantian Zheng (review). *China Review International*, 21(2), 195–198. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cri.2014.0020>
- Wei, J. (2020). *Queer Chinese Cultures and Mobilities: Kinship, Migration, and Middle Classes*. Hong Kong University Press, HKU.
- Wei, W. (2007). “Wandering Men” No Longer Wander Around: The Production and Transformation of Local Homosexual Identities in Postsocialist Chengdu, China”, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8 (4):572-588.
- Weiss, M. (2016). Always After: Desiring Queerness, Desiring Anthropology. *Cultural Anthropology*, 31(4), 627–638.
- Weston, K. (1997) [1991]. *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wilson, A. (2006). Queering Asia. *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, 14(3).
- Wittig, M. (1992). *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. London; New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Wolcott, H. (2008). *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing* (2nd ed). AltaMira Press.
- Wolf, M. (1984). Marriage, Family, and the State in Contemporary China. *Pacific Affairs*, 57(2), 213–236. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2759124>
- Wong, D. (2007). Rethinking the coming home alternative: Hybridization and coming out politics in Hong Kong’s anti-homophobia parades. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 8(4), 600–616. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649370701568052>
- Xiaobai and Xiangqi. (2006). Nvtongxinglian de shijie jiqi wenhua [Chinese] [female homosexual worlds and their culture]. Available from http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_462b1d280100bfj7.html
- Xie, Y. (2013). *Gender and Family in Contemporary China*. Population Studies Center Research Report 13, 808.
- Yan, Y. (2001). Practicing Kinship in Rural North China. In Franklin, S., & McKinnon, S. (ed.). *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*. Durham [NC]: Duke University Press.

- Yan, Y. (2003). *Private Life Under Socialism: Love, intimacy, and family change in a Chinese village, 1949-1999* (ACLS Fellows' publications). Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Yan, Y. (2011). The Changing Moral Landscape. In Kleinman, A., Yan, Y., Jun, J., Lee, S., Zhang, E., Tianshu, P., ... Jinhua, G. *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person* (1st ed.). University of California Press.
- Yan, Y. (2017). Doing Personhood in Chinese Culture. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 35(2), 1–17.
- Yang, C. K. (1957). The Functional Relationship between Confucian Thought and Chinese Religion. In J. K. Fairbank, (ed.), *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, pp. 269-290. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Yeung, W.-J. J., & Hu, S. (2016). Paradox in marriage values and behavior in contemporary China. *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 2(3), 447–476.
- Ying, G. (2003). Consumption Patterns of Chinese Children. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 24(4), 373–379. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1027385427303>
- Yu, J., & Xie, Y. (2015). Cohabitation in China: Trends and determinants. *Population and Development Review*, 41(4), 607–628.
- Zai Zhongguo xiangyao hefa shouyang haizi youduonan? [Chinese] [How difficult is it to adopt a child in China?] 06 January 2013. *Tencent* [Online]. Available from <http://view.news.qq.com/zt2013/langkao/index.htm> [accessed 1 August 2015]
- Zhang, E. Y. (2011). China's Sexual Revolution. In Kleinman, A., Yan, Y., Jun, J., Lee, S., Zhang, E., Tianshu, P., ... Jinhua, G. *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person* (1st ed.). University of California Press.
- Zhang, L. (2008). Private Homes, Distinct Lifestyles: Performing a New Middle Class. In: Zhang, L and Ong, A. *Privatizing China: Socialism from afar*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Zhang, X., Guo, F., & Zhai, Z. (2019). China's Demographic Future Under the New Two-Child Policy. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 38(4), 537–563. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-019-09519-0>
- Zhao, J. & Wang, Y. 30 April 2014. Shenti yu shenfen de mafan: xing yu xingbie guanxi [Chinese] [body and identity trouble: the relationship between sex and gender]. *Renmin University Sexuality Studies* [online]. Available from <http://www.sex-study.org/news.php?isweb=2&sort=64&id=2104> [accessed 10 May 2015].
- Zheng, T. (2015). *Tongzhi Living: Men Attracted to Men in Postsocialist China*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Zhonghua renmin gongheguo renkou yu jihua shengyu fa [Population and Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China]. (2001, December 29). Retrieved 9 January 2020, from http://www.gov.cn/banshi/2005-08/21/content_25059.htm
- Zigong chuzu: Zhongguo daiyun shichang jiemi. [Chinese] [Renting out the womb: the underground production line of Chinese surrogacy market]. (2017, March 27). Sohu.com. Retrieved 9 January 2020, from www.sohu.com/a/130593869_629679

Appendix I – Information about Key Research Participants

Name	Sex	Birth Year	Place of Birth	Place of Residence	Occupation
Alice	F	1992	Chengdu, SC	Shenzhen, GD	Research Student
An	M	1985	Fuyang, AH	Shenzhen, GD	Investment
Bei	M	1980	Wuhan, HB	Shenzhen, GD	Private company
Ben	M	1996	Fuzhou, FJ	Shenzhen, GD	Student
Billy	F	1992	Shenzhen, GD	Shenzhen, GD	Civil engineer
Chen	F	1983	Zhuzhou, HN	Guangzhou, GD	ART company
Claire	F	1991	Baoshan, YN	Shenzhen, GD	Consultant
Danny	F	1989	Chengdu, SC	Shenzhen, GD	Lawyer
Ei	F	1982	Chengdu, SC	Chengdu, SC	Self-employed
Fei	F	1996	Chaoshan, GD	Shenzhen, GD	ART company
Fiona	F	1992	Chengdu, SC	Shenzhen, GD	IT industry
Guan	F	1990	Nanchang, JX	Shenzhen, GD	State-owned enterprise
Hong	F	1985	Xiangtan, HN	Shenzhen, GD	Self-employed
Joe	M	1974	CQ	Guangzhou, GD	Freelancer
Joey	F	1989	Nantong, JS	Guangzhou, GD	Estate agent
Lin	F	1986	Bozhou, AH	Shenzhen, GD	Sales
Ma	M	1982	Guangzhou, GD	Guangzhou, GD	Self-employed
Mei	F	1989	Dongguan, GD	Shenzhen, GD	Private company clerk
Mellow	F	1986	Mianyang, SC	Shenzhen, GD	Freelancer
Min	M	1973	Hohhot, NM	Shenzhen, GD	Professor
Mo	F	1989	Chengdu, SC	Shenzhen, GD	Designer
Pam	F	1990	Chengdu, SC	Shenzhen, GD	Freelancer; civil servant
Rong	M	1992	Changsha, HN	Shenzhen, GD	State-owned enterprise
Saisai	F	1989	Chengdu, SC	Chengdu, SC	State-owned enterprise
Sally	F	1985	Wuhan, HB	Guangzhou, GD	Civil servant
Tian	M	1980	Yongzhou, HN	Dongguan, GD	Self-employed
Tommy	M	1969	Nanning, GX	Guangzhou, GD	Journalist
Wen	F	1985	Xiamen, FJ	Guangzhou, GD	Self-employed
Xie	F	1975	Zhuzhou, HN	Shenzhen, GD	Self-employed
Ye	M	1985	Shenzhen, GD	Shenzhen, GD	Freelancer
Yina	F	1990	Chengdu, SC	Chengdu, SC	Hotel chain
Youzi	F	1989	Dongguan, GD	Shenzhen, GD	State-owned enterprise
Zhao	M	1980	Jiujiang, JX	Guangzhou, GD	LGBT NPO; ART company
Zhenzhen	F	1995	Shenzhen, GD	Shenzhen, GD	ART company

Appendix II - Glossary of Chinese Words & Slangs

A luan B huai A 卵 B 怀	Mengdanghudui 门当户对
Baiwan 掰弯	Mianzi 面子
Bao Chenggong 包成功	Mingbi 冥币
Baosheng 包生	Mingan 敏感
Biaomian 表面	Moren 默认
Bufen 不分	Nanchang 男娼
Caihong jiating 彩虹家庭	Nanghai 男孩
Chuangtong 传统	Pianghun 骗婚
Chuanzongjiedai 传宗接代	Putong ren 普通人
Daimu/Daima 代母/ 代妈	Qinsheng 亲生
Fangzi 房子	Sanguan 三观
Feizhengfu zuzhi 非政府组织	Shengnv 剩女
Feiyingli zuzhi 非营利组织	Shidu jiating 失独家庭
Fengshou chengben 分手成本	Shiguan ying'er 试管婴儿
Gaige kaifang 改革开放	Shushu 叔叔
Gaoji 高级	Suzhi 素质
Gehuigejia 各回各家	Tanlian'ai 谈恋爱
Gongjing Gongluan 供精供卵	Tongfu 同夫
Guanxi 关系	Tongqi 同妻
Guimi 闺蜜	Tongxinglian 同性恋
Guoji 过继	Tongzhi 同志
Guorizi 过日子	Wenhe 温和
Haigui 海归	Wending 稳定
Haizi 孩子	Xiao 孝
Hexie 和谐	Xingshi hunyin/ Xinghun 形式婚姻/形婚
Houdai 后代	Xiongdi 兄弟
Huangdi 皇帝	Xuequ fang 学区房
Hukou 户口	Xueyuan 血缘
Hukou suozaidi 户口所在地	Yang 养
Huko leibie 户口类别	Yang er fanglao 养儿防老
Jia 家	Yanzhi 颜值
Jiaguotonggou 家国同构	Ye 爷
Jiban 羁绊	Yuxiao 愚孝
Jijian 鸡奸	Yuepao 约炮
Kaopu 靠谱	Zhenjinbaiyin 真金白银
Ku'er 酷儿	Zhihun 直婚
Laiwang 来往	Zhiren 直人
Lala 拉拉	Zhongchan jiecheng 中产阶层
Laogong 老公	Zuoren 做人
Laopo 老婆	Zuxian 祖先
Laoxiang 老乡	
Lingyang 领养	
Liumang xingwei 流氓行为	
Liushou ertong 留守儿童	
Luanmei 卵妹	
Luantong 变童	
Luoci 裸辞	